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VIOLA HUDSON

A NOVEL

BY

ISABEL C. CLARKE

Author of "Carina," etc.



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To
MRS. W. D. BOSANQUET
*In Remembrance of
Happy Days Spent Long Ago
At Udapussellawa*

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VIOLA HUDSON

BOOK I

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BOOK I

CHAPTER I

VIOLA HUDSON lay curled up on a sofa in the small dark study at the back of a dining-room in South Kensington. A lighted lamp stood upon a table at her side, and in the grate a fire burned dully. On the table, too, was a small pile of brightly bound novels which had just arrived from a circulating library. She had intercepted them in the hall, and was glancing somewhat perfunctorily at their contents before deciding which one she would read. She was aware that very soon her sister-in-law, Cecily Hudson, would inevitably come and claim them.

It was only eleven o'clock in the morning, but outside a peculiarly dense fog reigned triumphantly over the January day. There was no getting away from it. Even indoors, with all the doors and windows hermetically sealed, it found a way of creeping through unsuspected and invisible interstices into your eyes and ears and throat, threatening to blind and choke you with its malodorous fumes. Of the pea-soup variety, it blotted out the world, enveloping it in a false, strange, unnatural darkness. The little garden with its strip of grass, its smoke-blackened shrubs and row of naked poplar trees, was completely swallowed up by the thick, nauseous curtain.

On clear days the garden gave Viola furtive glimpses, tantalizing, negligible, of Nature's wonders in a world of blackened bricks and mortar and stained stucco. She had lived in the country all through her childhood, and she still loved to watch with a kind of nostalgia the first tentative advances of spring, the waning of autumn into winter, which the garden, small though it was, could yet offer her.

Viola, as she lay there in an indolent attitude, was a long, slim, attractive creature, graceful despite the now almost grotesque dress of the 'nineties, to which this portion of her history belongs. Her dark heavy hair was worn, without regard to prevailing fashion, brushed close to her head and twisted in a great loose knot at her neck. She had a square white brow and long eyebrows above eyes of singular beauty. They were dark, calm, fearless eyes, and belied that hint of discontent and restlessness suggested by the slightly downward droop of her mouth.

She put down the book and her thoughts traveled back to Ardlesham, where ten years of her childhood had been spent under the ægis of an elderly great-aunt to whose care she had been consigned after the death of her mother. She was the only daughter among a family of sons, and had been indeed what is sometimes known as the "afterthought," for she had come into the world fourteen years later than her youngest brother, George. Her father, whom she did not remember, had died when she was two. Her mother survived him only four years. It was said that her anguish at leaving the little daughter, for whom she had always longed, was almost tragic in its intensity. Viola had felt as a child—felt it still when things went wrong—that she had been cheated. She had never, since she was six, known the sheltered home life of the child whose parents are still alive, with the cosy nursery, the competent nurse, the regular walks, the incessant attention, the petting and the

constant, loving care. These things had not been hers. Miss Hope Malleson, the great-aunt in question, had come forward and offered to take charge of "poor dear Louisa's" little girl. She made one condition, that she was to be allowed to bring her up as a Catholic. There was no one to oppose the scheme, and by her three brothers the prompt solution of such a difficult problem as Viola's future was eagerly welcomed. Matthew, the eldest, who was then twenty-four, was a tea-planter in Ceylon. Percival was at Oxford with the intention of being called to the Bar when he had taken his degree. George had just left Woolwich and was in the Army. Miss Malleson—their father's aunt—was almost their only near relation. Viola was conducted to her new home at Ardlesham by Percival. He gave her ten shillings and told her to be a good little girl. Then he went away feeling that he had discharged a very disagreeable duty which should by rights have fallen to Matthew.

Miss Malleson was a slightly austere Catholic. She was a convert, and it sometimes seemed that in embracing a new faith she had not perfectly emancipated herself from the joylessness of the old. There was a touch of Calvinism, not in her creed but in her nature. She had been brought up in an old-world Evangelical school. She was often severe with Viola because she held it to be her duty to check certain wilful tendencies in the child's passionate, warm-hearted nature. And Viola was not an easy child. She had been her mother's darling for six years, during which time she had never known a harsh word, nor the meaning of punishment. All this was now changed. It was perhaps strange that with her harshness, her rigidity, Miss Malleson did not give the child an actual distaste for the religion in which she educated her. Fortunately, however, this did not prove to be the case. Almost from the first,

Viola was imbued with a passionate love for the Blessed Virgin. She saw in her a divinely maternal Figure to whom she could take all the very real and bitter little trials and troubles of her new life. She was comforted with the thought of that love, bestowed so freely upon all little children because to Mary had been confided the care of the Divine Child. Perhaps at first there was some confusion in Viola's mind between this Mother and her own. But the love she had for her grew with her growth. She could remember the little scene that took place every night in the dining-room when the whole household assembled, and kneeling, recited the rosary. She could hear even now the fervent voice of the Irish cook sounding loud above the rest.

With a child's instinctive knowledge Viola had realized that from the first she had formed an unwanted item in the economy of the little household at Ardlesham. She was a discordant element in that prim little country house. Miss Malleson believed that the way to bring up a child was on a nicely devised system of punishments. Their severity was calculated to match the heinousness of the crime. For disobedience or untruthfulness no mercy was shown. A less spirited child would have been cowed by the stern upbringing.

But Miss Malleson had died suddenly when Viola was eleven, and in her will she left her the whole of her little fortune, amounting to about five or six thousand pounds. The interest was to accumulate until Viola came of age—a restriction which was always resented by her brothers, who declared they were out of pocket, since Viola possessed little money besides this legacy. The question again arose as to what should become of her. She was sent to a convent school, and her holidays, it was decided, should be spent with George, now quartered at

Woolwich. He was married and had a little family, and his rather worldly wife disliked the burden of the dark-haired, long-legged child. At seventeen—barely a year ago—Viola had left school, and George had been ordered to Malta, whither he altogether declined to take her. She was once more stranded, and a family council was held to decide her future. George wrote to Matthew and asked him if he would now take charge of his sister. Matthew was a man little given to promiscuous extravagance, but from a remote fastness in the Ceylon hills he cabled his answer, "*Certainly not*," without delay. To Viola that *Certainly not* had been like a blow in the face. His subsequent letter had, however, shown that his reasons for this abrupt refusal were prompted by a deep, unselfish consideration for his sister's welfare. He enumerated them categorically, for he was a methodical man. They were: (1) that his bungalow had no accommodation for a lady, (2) that it was situated eight miles from a cartroad through a stretch of hilly jungle, and (3) that Viola could hardly be expected to waste her youth and chances of matrimony in that remote and inhospitable spot. He did not add that his recollection of her when under George's roof would alone have decided his answer. He could see her now, as pretty as a flower but mutinous and passionate, with kindling eyes and puckered brow, stamping her foot because Mrs. George Hudson had refused to allow her to have a new summer frock in place of the one which Viola declared had become too short. He did not think that sort of thing would promote his own peace. Besides, he was a recluse and something of a miser, and he felt that the presence of a young and pretty and obviously self-willed sister would be certain to attract, in that particularly womanless district, a host of impecunious and undesirable young men to the bungalow.

It was a relief to everyone when Percival, always indolently good-natured, affirmed his readiness to take her.

"And of course," thought Viola, "when I'm twenty-one I shall go and live by myself."

In the rather narrow groove to which fate had consigned her, in the house of a busy brother and a slightly ill-tempered sister-in-law, Viola was often restive. On that foggy morning the desire for change and movement almost cruelly possessed her. She looked up suddenly and addressed the blackened pane of glass which presented her with a smudged reflection of herself, faintly illuminated by the electric lamp. Its blurred, uncertain outlines resembled an unfinished impression by a master artist.

"If I ever have a daughter—" she said aloud.

The face reflected in the window smiled back with a discontent that was at once cynical and rather sorrowful.

She did not finish the sentence.

"Viola! Viola!"

She did not move. Let Cecily come and find her! She opened a book and feigned to be reading when Mrs. Percival Hudson bustled into the room.

"Viola! I've been hunting for you. I found the children alone and absolutely idle. No preparation—nothing! I told you I should want you to give them their lessons this morning."

Viola dropped her book on the floor. Before answering she stretched out a long slim arm to recover it. Cecily was evidently in an irate mood. She was a little hard-faced woman, dressed with an extreme of neatness.

"But that was because you were going to shop in High Street. You can't be going out now in this—" Viola gave a little fastidious shudder as she glanced again at the window and at the false night that reigned outside. "No one could, you know."

"I have plenty to do indoors. And I can't possibly do it unless someone takes the children off my hands. They must learn their lessons, and I wish you would understand that, as you have nothing in the world to do except lie here and read novels, I *wish* you to give them three hours' lessons every morning and then take them for a walk."

She raised her voice a little. Viola exasperated her. Here she was, living with them, not paying a penny piece toward her keep (but that was Percival's fault for refusing to take anything) and never raising a finger to help anyone.

"They're your children, not mine," said Viola, coolly; "if they were mine they should go to school every day. They're quite old enough, and they need the stimulus of other children."

"They are far too young to go to school. And you have nothing to do—you can perfectly well teach them. You need occupation. And I suppose you learned something at that expensive convent school!" Cecily glanced significantly at the little heap of novels lying on the table. "You are terribly idle, Viola. Percival was only saying this morning—"

"Thank you—I don't in the least want to know what Percival said!"

"If you were not here, you would have to be earning your own living. You could teach or nurse . . ."

"Well, I should like nothing better than to go on the stage!"

"On the stage? My dear Viola—Percival would never permit it for a moment!"

"I wish I had been born thirty years later," said Viola, with a sigh. "I've a kind of prophetic instinct that round about the year nineteen-twenty, girls will be able to work in all kinds of ways that are closed to them now, without being thought im-

proper or revolutionary. When you came in I was just thinking that when I have a daughter—if I ever do have one—”

“It’s a pity that you waste your time with such silly day-dreams!”

“Even Margery will have more liberty than I’ve ever had!” said Viola, disregarding her.

“Margery will do as she is told!” snapped Cecily, with decision.

Viola rose languidly. “Well, I’ll go up and try to teach the young idea to shoot,” she said, trailing toward the door. She was very graceful with her small well-set head; she carried herself like a young queen.

As she said the words, it came into her mind that the twigs were decidedly unpromising; they were both so like their mother. Cecily imposed her personality on people; she had even diminished Percival’s lightness of touch. . . .

He was a very busy man, making a good income at the Bar. They might just as well have engaged a governess for their children. She was sure that Percival had never intended that she should teach them.

Margery and Lionel were very stupid that morning. It was as if the fog had penetrated into their brains, slightly congesting them. It seemed to Viola indeed that they were obstinately stupid. She had a special aptitude for teaching, as Cecily had not been slow to discover; her vivid imagination could invest even commonplace things with a spark of poetry and romance. She had a gay, bright, interesting way of imparting knowledge. But Margery and Lionel were singularly unresponsive. They were lethargic and inattentive, gazing at their aunt with lack-lustre eyes. The music lessons were a perfect martyrdom to Viola, for she had a real gift for music and both played and sang charmingly.

But Cecily would not hear of her foregoing them.

"Of course they must learn, and you do that better than anything," she had said, with a tightening of her determined mouth.

"Have you learned your history, Margery?"

"No."

"Have you, Lionel?"

"Yeth."

"Let me hear it, then. Margery must learn hers after tea."

Lionel stumbled through his lesson. He was the more painstaking and conscientious of the two. Margery was obstinately determined to resist all efforts to educate her. She rejected every branch of knowledge with an impartial disdain.

"That's very good, Lionel. Now your arithmetic."

For the next half hour the mysteries of Long Division absorbed their attention. Lionel accomplished his task, laboriously but accurately. He was a year younger than Margery—it was a satisfaction to beat her. She, however, felt no shame.

"Please, miss, Lady Bethnell's in the drawing-room and wishês to see you." The maid's prim voice interrupted a brilliant and detailed account of the execution of Mary Stuart. Viola was determined to make the lesson interesting and alive; she would not let herself be deterred by the children's dull, uninspired eyes so firmly fixed upon her face. They were like Cecily—that was what was the matter with them.

"You can learn your geography while I'm downstairs," said Viola. "This page—mind you look at the map. Learn the rivers by heart."

She gave a hasty pat to her perfectly tidy head and went downstairs.

CHAPTER II

LADY BETHNELL had been a neighbor—a remote, powerful if somewhat inaccessible neighbor—of Miss Malleson's. She had known Viola as a little girl at Ardlesham, and the brightest intervals of that drab stretch of the child's life had been when she was invited to tea at the Park. She could remember going there, walking sedately by the side of her aunt's maid Rebecca, her face washed, not to say scrubbed, and still stinging a little from the energetic process, her dark hair in a tight long plait, and her small straight form attired in the best dress and shoes never worn on week-days for any other reason in the world.

At the end of the walk, there was Lady Bethnell, a little gruff and abrupt but extraordinarily kind . . . and there was Esmé. Esmé was the only child of the house, a wild undisciplined boy a few years older than herself. She had invariably followed where he led and always—as far as she was concerned—with disastrous results. Once she had fallen into the pond—or had Esmé pushed her in? They could never quite decide how it had happened, but she had returned home with her frock and shoes soaking and ruined. Another time she had fallen from a tree and had come back bruised and bleeding, with her garments torn and her face scratched. She was very plucky, Esmé used to tell her, for however much she was hurt she never yelled. But he did not know how sharply she had to suffer for these childish misdemeanors.

Esmé was in India with his regiment. She had not seen him for many years—not since the old Ardlesham days. But Lady Bethnell remembered her, came to see her sometimes when she was in town, and sent her a present at Christmas. There

was sympathy between the elderly woman and the young girl.

Lady Bethnell had an old irascible husband with whom she periodically quarreled violently. If he continued impenitently irascible she, being a woman of boundless spirit, would leave him at Ardlesham, and go abroad for her health until he was in a better frame of mind. Such a moment had now supervened, and it was fortunate that it synchronized with a spell of the most evil weather January could offer. She felt that she had every excuse for leaving him.

Lord Bethnell was a self-made man; his title was a brand-new one, and he was very proud of it. His wife, who had a respectable array of ancestors, was less dazzled by it. Still, it was something to hand on to Esmé, whom she adored with an imprudent unwisdom that even sometimes astonished herself.

"Well, my dear child, I'm in luck to find you!"

She kissed Viola energetically on both cheeks.

"You didn't suppose I should be out in this fog?" inquired Viola.

"I am a cockney—I never pay any attention to fogs. They are part of London. Just as much a part of it as the Thames or the Marble Arch! Don't let that sister-in-law of yours come in, my dear; she makes me nervous!"

"It'll take her twenty minutes to dress," said Viola mendaciously, "so you're safe for the present. It is nice to see you!"

Lady Bethnell beamed. She was about sixty and still handsome, bearing her years well. She was enveloped in furs. soft, costly, wonderful. She still clung to the even then dying fashion of wearing a bonnet with strings. It disclosed her thick gray hair, accurately parted and waving in a natural crinkle. She had green eyes—the color of green water and almost as clear. Esmé had inherited

the eyes, and the fine crinkly hair, though his was still of a pale golden brown.

"I want you to pack up your things—of course you'll say you haven't any—and come abroad with me almost at once. My niece—the one I always take—has got measles. So childish, and she's nearly forty! My doctor says I must positively go abroad, and I'm going to Santa Margherita and then to Venice. I simply can't face the winter at Ardlesham without Esmé, especially now Bethnell has got the gout!"

"Go abroad with you?" repeated Viola, almost as if she had not heard aright.

It sounded like a fantastic fairy tale—the sort of thing that never happened in real life. And Lady Bethnell was right—she hadn't a rag to her back.

"But of course I can't," she continued, with a swift return to earth; "it's impossible—it would cost too much—Cecily would never spare me."

"It won't cost you anything at all. And I should think Mrs. Hudson would be thankful to be relieved of the responsibility. You were always a handful, my dear child! You shall come as my daughter. Of course I shall take my maid, but I want someone to go about with me. As for clothes—there are shops in Italy, you know."

She had a magic way of demolishing petty obstacles.

"Besides, I want you. I won't be put off. I'm a selfish old woman and I want a young face with me. I thought of it this morning when Pearce was doing my hair. It came into my head like an inspiration. I said to myself: That poor child Viola Hudson has a frightfully thin time—why not take her?"

"You're a darling," said Viola. She knew that Lady Bethnell liked to be addressed in this familiar,

affectionate fashion. "It was too dear of you to think of it. But of course I can't come—" All the time she was speaking, her heart was beating with excitement. "I've simply nothing to wear. I've mortgaged my next quarter's allowance. You couldn't possibly be seen with such a shabby companion."

"Oh, that doesn't matter. My woman shall run you up a few things to go on with. Just a frock or two—I'll take you there to-morrow morning. And we shall start on Monday. You mustn't say no, Viola. If you do, I shall have to take my other niece, Peggy, and she bores me to death. I don't feel up to her."

"I'll ask Cecily," said Viola, "but she hates my doing anything exciting."

Still, the plan seemed to be materializing under Lady Bethnell's capable hands.

She had never been abroad. Italy for her held the magic allurements, the age-old charm it possesses for the young of every generation. She was nearly eighteen and she had seen nothing. Cecily always said she wasn't old enough to come out.

Then suddenly she thought of the two children idling over their geography lesson upstairs.

"But who'll teach Margery and Lionel? And they're so backward!"

"My dear, they are Mrs. Hudson's children, not yours. She must make other arrangements."

The door opened and Mrs. Hudson came into the room, more quietly than usual for she was a little in awe of her visitor. She had spent the brief interval in donning a black silk dress she had lately acquired. Her hair was very neatly arranged. She made a strong contrast to Viola, who had rushed down from the schoolroom still clad in her shabby blouse and skirt to greet her old friend. It was

astonishing that with so little trouble she always managed to look so charming.

Lady Bethnell greeted Mrs. Hudson with a touch of formality. At such moments she was very much the great lady who held a whole neighborhood under her autocratic sway. She belonged to a type that has now utterly vanished.

"I'm going to steal Viola, Mrs. Hudson. Take her away from these fogs. . . . We start for Italy on Monday."

Viola's dark eyes shone. The assurance in Lady Bethnell's tone almost convinced her of her capability of carrying the scheme into effect. And to go away—quite away—into the sunshine. . . . Not to teach Margery and Lionel any more. Never to hear those dreadful wrong notes.

Cecily's face stiffened. "You have asked Viola to go to Italy with you?"

"Yes. As my daughter . . . I shall pay all the expenses," said Lady Bethnell.

"Oh, Cecily, won't it be just perfect? Venice!"

"I've heard it's very damp and foggy there in winter," observed Mrs. Hudson, determinedly unenthusiastic.

"We shall go to the Italian Riviera first," said Lady Bethnell.

"And Viola has simply nothing to wear. She never has. Worn through at once—" She eyed the shabby serge skirt that did nothing to detract from the slim boyish grace of its wearer.

"We've discussed that—I'm going to see about it to-morrow. Well, that's all, I think, my dear. Come to lunch to-morrow. My usual rooms in Dover Street."

"Oh, but I've never thanked you," said Viola, beaming.

"Wait till the end of our trip. I'm a tiresome old woman—it won't be roses all the way!"

She rose, shook hands with Mrs. Hudson and slipped her hand in Viola's arm. In the narrow hall they faced each other under the blurred electric lamp, dimmed by the fog.

Viola leaned down a little, for she was the taller of the two, and kissed Lady Bethnell, whispering, "But I *do* thank you. It'll be lovely going quite away like that. I'm so sick of it here."

She opened the front door. The fog had lifted a little, and it was now possible to discern a phantom-like horse and brougham, just beyond the curb. A phantom figure in livery approached, touched his hat and opened the door of the carriage. Lady Bethnell made a stately and dignified entrance, and brougham and occupant vanished, swallowed up by the thick, choking, yellow curtain.

Viola went back soberly to the drawing-room. Mrs. Hudson was standing near the fire, and as she came in she said abruptly:

"It's all nonsense, Viola. Of course you can't go. I didn't like to say so in front of Lady Bethnell—she has such a rude way of catching one up!"

"Oh, but it's all quite settled and I'm going on Monday. Please don't let us discuss it, Cecily."

"Percival is your guardian—I feel positive that he won't allow it!"

"Dear old Percival—he always wants me to enjoy myself. And I've known Lady Bethnell since I was a small child. Of course I'm going with her."

Cecily's tight-lipped "We shall see" was scarcely encouraging. She meant to speak to Percival privately. Such a trip as that, would ruin Viola. It was difficult enough to get her to help in any way now, and she would certainly return more useless and indolent than ever.

"I must go back to the children," said Viola, moving toward the door. "Oh, won't it be *fun*, Cecily? I want to go to Venice more than anywhere in the world!"

Already her active imagination was conjuring up a mental picture of St. Mark's, with its gilded cupolas, its wide white piazza, where the world-famous pigeons preened and disported themselves. She saw, too, the Doge's Palace, the Bridge of Sighs, the Lagoon lying under the stars, the gondolas floating idly upon it. Light and air and water and sunshine. . . . This fog choked you.

She ran lightly up the stairs. Her eyes and cheeks were aglow.

Soberly she entered the schoolroom.

"Have you learned your geography, Margery?"

"No."

"That'll be a double lesson to do after tea."

Margery puckered up her face. "No," she said, firmly.

"Well, we'll see about that," said Viola. "Have you learned yours, Lionel?"

"Yeth. But Margery would talk."

"Don't tell tales."

For another half-hour the lessons went on. Then Viola said:

"Margery, when you have a governess you'll have to pay more attention or you'll get into trouble. I'm going away next week, and I don't expect I shall ever teach you again."

Margery lifted dull, critical, hostile eyes.

"Going away for good?"

"Well, for a long time, anyhow."

"Hooray," said Margery, clapping her small brown hands.

"You'll have to do lessons, all the same," said Viola.

"Shan't do them," said Margery, obstinately.

"I'm not glad Aunt Viola's going," said Lionel, reflectively. He had an obscure desire to dissociate himself from his sister's revolutionary views.

"You were always a muff," said Margery, contemptuously.

"Now run off and wash your hands," said Viola, briskly.

Percival only returned home to luncheon on Saturdays and Sundays when he was not playing golf, so Cecily had to control her impatience till he came in about seven o'clock. He was met almost on the threshold by a perturbed-looking wife.

"My dear Cissy, what's happened now? I hope no one's been run down in the fog!"

"Come into the drawing-room, Percival. I wish to speak to you alone. Lady Bethnell came this morning and she wants to take Viola with her to Italy next week, paying all the expenses."

"Jolly lucky for Vi! It's time she saw something of the world."

He was very fond of his sister, in an undemonstrative, brotherly fashion, often wishing, however, that she hit it off better with Cecily. She was such a good-looking girl—knew how to do her hair and put on her clothes. He felt that she did him credit.

"And the children can go to school," he continued; "they're idle little beggars—they don't do a stroke of work."

"It is entirely Viola's fault that Margery is so backward. She doesn't understand her."

"My dear, the child absolutely refuses to learn. Boasts of it. Vi's told me so."

Cecily flushed. "Oh, of course she hasn't a good word for any of us! And she'll be ten times worse if she goes abroad. She'll be fit for nothing after being thoroughly spoilt by a rich woman like Lady Bethnell." There was a note of fretful exasperation in her voice.

"Well, she'll soon be off our hands, in any case. Bound to marry, you know—a good-looking girl like that, with a few hundreds a year of her own."

"Men don't care for Catholic wives," said Cecily. "And she has only fifty pounds a year till she comes of age."

Meanwhile Viola was up in her room, turning out the contents of her wardrobe, examining each garment in turn, putting in a stitch here and there, and wondering if Rebecca would have any time in which to help her. Her attic was cold, but to-night she didn't even resent Cecily's rule: "No fires in bedrooms except in case of illness." She had put on a fur coat, and worked diligently till the gong sounded. Then she flung on a tea-gown, and at the clang of the second gong ran downstairs. Percival kissed her—an unusual attention.

"Glad to hear of your good luck, Vi! There's a son, isn't there?"

"Yes. But he's in India, so don't build on that," laughed Viola.

Percival beamed. "The children will miss you. Idle little beggars—I mean to send them both to school."

"Lionel, perhaps," interposed Cecily, "but not Margery. She mustn't be forced."

"Forced!" Percival rocked with laughter.

"Most fathers like to think their children are moderately intelligent," said Cecily, with asperity.

"So they do—if they've half a chance. Ask Viola if Margery's ever done a stroke of work since she took on their lessons."

"Viola does not understand them. They have certainly made no progress in the past year," said Mrs. Hudson, pointedly.

"Well, that shows they want a firmer hand than Vi's. I'm sure she has slaved enough."

Viola scarcely listened to the discussion, although

she was dimly aware that Percival was taking her part—always an unwise thing to do. She was slowly determining that she would never again return to Cecily's roof if she could avoid it. . . . It was far, far worse than it had been at Woolwich with the George Hudsons. George's wife was very trying, but, then, she was nearly always out. Cecily rarely went out and was almost invariably at home to meals.

"I hope Viola will make a good marriage," said Percival. "She'll meet people now."

He felt that almost anything was possible under the ample, opulent wing of Lady Bethnell. He had always wanted to "do something" for his sister, and was glad she should have this opportunity of going abroad.

"Oh, but I don't want to be married. I want to be free," said Viola.

"That's all nonsense—women can't be free," said Percival, sagaciously.

Sometimes he was slightly anxious about Viola. She had an independent spirit which seemed to him dangerous.

Cecily was thinking what a shocking housekeeper Viola would make. And she didn't really care for children. She had never even tried to understand Margery. It was almost a consolation to Mrs. Hudson to feel that Viola's religion would certainly stand in the way of her making a brilliant marriage . . . unless, of course, she married a foreigner.

CHAPTER III

"I DON'T mind telling you in confidence, my dear, that I've had one of the worst rows with Bethnell I've ever had in my life. He's too obstinate for words, and I need hardly tell you it's about

Esmé. The poor boy has been in India for more than two years, and he's run through all his money, of course—he always does. And he ought to come home, and Bethnell refuses to send him another penny. It isn't as if he hadn't got heaps. He simply doesn't know what to do with it all. I can't make him realize the heavy expenses Esmé has in India. He plays polo, and then he goes out a great deal."

Lady Bethnell adored her only child. She found a sympathetic listener in Viola, who had never forgotten her old admiration for the proud wilful boy who had once been the only intimate playmate she had in the world.

"It's a shame. Bethnell doesn't understand young men. And like all self-made people he sits on his money."

"I should like to see Esmé again. Why, he was at Eton when I left Ardlesham," said Viola.

Lady Bethnell produced a collection of photographs, some mere snap-shots, others finished and professional products. Esmé in uniform, Esmé on his polo pony, Esmé with racquet in hand. Always the same proud bold face, insolent as if aware of its own beauty. Very fair, with blond crinkly hair, and green eyes—like a cat's. That was how Viola remembered him.

Well, he wouldn't quarrel with her now. Perhaps he would give her a curt nod and a stare, and pass on, if he were to see her again. His mother's traveling companion. . . . She was piqued at the thought.

"The money flows through his fingers," continued Lady Bethnell, meditatively, as she laid down the photographs one by one. "I do hope he will marry a rich woman. There is a Miss Clethorpe, a near neighbor of ours, who would suit him admirably. So pretty, and quite an heiress. It was one of the

reasons why I wanted him to come home this year. There's no other solution. Bethnell is seventy, and he will probably live another twenty years. And he won't even send him the money for his passage."

She put the photographs back in a drawer. Presently she added, in a more hopeful tone: "If he wants to get me back from Venice he'll cable for Esmé. I know he hates it when I'm not at Ardlesham."

So the journey abroad was being taken to force his hand.

She was in a generous mood and her gifts to Viola were expensive and dainty. There was a costly fur coat such as Viola had never dreamed of possessing. But Lady Bethnell had no fancy for going about with a shabby companion. And it pleased her, too, to see the girl's lovely young face light up, as she made these purchases.

"If Esmé could see her," she thought.

And mentally she resolved that as long as she could possibly prevent it, Esmé should not see her. He was twenty-two, and it would be fatal for him to make a foolish, imprudent marriage. And they had been intimate friends in the old days, those two. They could not meet as it were for the first time. There would be the bond of those youthful pleasant memories.

Lady Bethnell remained for some time on the Italian Riviera, at San Remo, Rapallo, Santa Margherita. She journeyed in leisurely fashion, renewing her acquaintance with the sunny little towns that clung pearl-like to the olive-clad shores, overlooking that wonderful blue sea. They did not reach Venice until March. Lady Bethnell rented a friend's apartment on the Grand Canal, and soon they were most comfortably installed there. The freedom of her present life was very sweet to Viola, and her duties were as few and as little irksome as possible. Her

friendship with Lady Bethnell deepened daily.

It was, too, her first glimpse of Italy, and Venice completely won her heart as it always does that of the imaginative foreigner. There were gray spring days of soft rain that blotted out the islands and hung filmy webs of mist over the lagoon, but even these were beautiful. Beautiful, too, were the days when the sharp tramontana wind blew vigorously down from Alpine snows, accompanied by brilliant sunlight that delineated everything with hard precise outlines. The chill air flowing in like a stream was brisk and invigorating.

And for the first time since she had left her convent school, Viola found herself in a Catholic atmosphere. This, however, held something deep and rich that she had never before savored. It affected her almost insensibly, and it softened her. The touch of defiance, developed in her life with Cecily, dropped from her. She seemed to expand like an exquisite flower.

Like many Englishwomen when abroad, Lady Bethnell usually attended Mass on Sundays. She was especially fond of St. Mark's, and thither they almost invariably went. A function with the Cardinal Patriarch present especially thrilled her. She lamented the absence of Cardinals in the English Church.

One day as they were walking home together after a long ceremony, Lady Bethnell said suddenly:

"I like the Catholic religion, but all the same I wish you weren't a Catholic."

"Why?" inquired Viola, interested but puzzled.

"Because I should like to have had you for my daughter-in-law," said Lady Bethnell, bluntly.

"Oh, you know you would never have thought me good enough!" laughed Viola.

"Well, there's no use thinking of it as things are. Esmé must marry money, and his wife must be a

Protestant, and sit in the front pew in Ardlesham church on Sundays. Anything else would scandalize the neighborhood most horribly. And then his father can do as he likes with his money—that's the worst of a self-made man, for then of course nothing is entailed. If Esmé doesn't do just as he wishes, he may be a pauper. I never knew anyone less suited to be a pauper—he has every expensive taste you can imagine!" She smiled reminiscently. "I, on the contrary, have always tried to give him everything he wanted whether it was good for him or not. He found that out before he was two. Nurse after nurse left in despair, saying that I was ruining him. As if anyone could ruin my beautiful boy."

"You must console yourself with the thought that, considering all my disabilities, we aren't likely to meet," said Viola. There was a touch of bitterness in her voice. No girl cares to have the fact of her ineligibility to be a certain man's wife rubbed in, so to speak. And she had the uncomfortable conviction that if she saw Esmé again, he would still possess that ancient power to attract her as he had done in the days when she was a little, willing, bullied slave to the handsome selfish boy.

Once he had picked her up in his arms and kissed her, saying:

"You're not half a bad little kid! I shouldn't have minded having a sister like you."

She reflected she must have been very small at the time, for him to lift her up with such ease. He had never kissed her again till the day when she had gone up to the Park to take leave of his mother, after the death and funeral of Miss Malleeson. She could see herself—a sedate, black-clad figure, secretly a little proud of her new mourning. They had all kissed her then, and told her they were sorry she was going away from Ardlesham.

Lady Bethnell could also remember that day.

Viola was a wild-looking little thing who had the air of having been caught and forcibly tamed. But Miss Malleson had not lived long enough to complete the taming process. She had sowed the seed, and passed on. And here in Venice Viola was becoming more and more aware of all that she had done for her. She had given her the Faith. The child had even then been thoroughly instructed in the great dogmas of her religion. But she felt that she had never loved it until now. She had never quite fully realized its beauty. And now she was told that it was something that would prevent Esmé from marrying her if she should ever meet him again. Not that they were ever likely to see each other. . . .

"I used to feel sorry for you at Ardlesham," said Lady Bethnell.

"Did you really?"

"Yes. You looked so forlorn. And poor dear Miss Malleson was a little terrifying."

"She certainly terrified me," said Viola, dryly.

"And yet she was very fond of you."

"Yes, I suppose she was. But she was very hard—she never overlooked the least little thing. I was glad when she died, and then I thought I was wicked. But it was almost worse when I went to live with George and his wife. Instead of being corrected and punished, I was simply neglected except when I was at school. That lasted nearly six years, and now I've been for more than a year with Cecily."

"I must congratulate you upon having survived."

"Percival's always kind. He's one of those fat good-natured men!"

"Still, you looked awfully hipped that day I came."

Viola laughed. "Did I? Well, you were a perfect fairy godmother! Bringing me here! If you

knew how I'd longed and longed to see Italy."

She looked at the broad water of the Canal flowing past in the bright sunshine. There was a sparkle, a dazzling light, that entranced her.

Lady Bethnell was touched and gratified. She had been actuated by a purely selfish motive, and by some ironical perversity she had been accredited with an altruistic one. Viola was certainly charming, and delicious to look at in this softened, changed aspect. That dour bringing up of hers had made her unselfish, considerate for others, easily pleased, eager to be of use. She had also a strong sense of duty. The ease and peace of her present life had improved her looks; she seemed to be blossoming in this soft Venetian air. The muggy sirocco, so often baleful in its effects, had brought a delicious tinge of color to her face, a brightness to her long dark eyes.

As long as Esmé wasn't there to see her! . . .

The days slipped by into weeks, the weeks into months, and found them both still unwearied of Venice. From England Lord Bethnell had given no sign of relenting; it was seldom he held out so long. He wrote perfectly friendly letters once a week; told his wife about the weather, his gout, the horses, the hunting, and much more of a domestic nature. Lady Bethnell replied to these epistles with good-humor and spirit. Incompatible as they were, and now half-estranged, they were still oddly necessary to each other. After twenty-five years of inharmonious matrimony, they were at any rate "old enemies."

May had come with a flood of sunshine that bathed the lagoons and canals with its gold. Even in this sea-girt city the gardens were a wonder of blossom. The roses rioted over the ancient gray walls, festooning them with fragrant tapestry; the acacias were in bloom, delicately scented; the mag-

nolias showed great creamy white cups amid their dark polished leaves. The air flowing in from sea and lagoon was divinely fresh.

Lady Bethnell never spoke of going home. Her lord remained obdurate—it really looked this time as if he did not intend to give way even to recover peace and harmony. The friendship between the two women deepened daily. They met and made numerous friends, and went out a good deal. Viola was greatly admired. People used to ask who that lovely English girl was. Lady Bethnell fussed over her, delighted that she should prove a success. Then one day in the midst of it all a brief note came from Ardlesham.

“Esmé writes he has had a touch of fever. I have cabled to him to come home; he is to pass through Venice and bring you on with him.”

It was abrupt enough, but Lady Bethnell could read between the lines, and knew that it had not been written without emotion. The tough dour old man could yield handsomely when he chose. That thought of telling Esmé to pass through Venice so as to join his mother and bring her home was so characteristic of him in his better moments.

Lady Bethnell took the note in her hand and ran unceremoniously into Viola's room. In her flushed excitement she seemed to have shed twenty years.

“Dear child—Esmé is coming home—he's to stop here and pick me up on his way!”

She dropped into a chair, panting a little. Viola's face fell. The news that brought so much joy to Lady Bethnell would abruptly terminate this delicious glimpse of life. The next moment she accused herself of egoism, and concealing all visible signs of disappointment she rose and went across the room to Lady Bethnell.

"This is indeed an answer to all your prayers!" she said lightly. But the lump in her throat hurt her.

Lady Bethnell, now quite overcome, was sobbing. "Oh, my dear, you can't think what this means to me! I haven't seen him for more than two years. Bethnell can be an angel if he likes, can't he? I'm going to send him a telegram at once to tell him what a darling he is. My own dear boy . . ."

"I wonder how soon he'll be here," said Viola.

She was thinking: "When he comes we shall leave at once, of course. She won't mind—she only thinks of her son . . ."

She was envious of this maternal obsession. It would be wonderful to be loved, as Esmé was loved. It was a love that had been wholly missing from her own life since she was six years old.

"I'm so glad—so very glad that you're to have him back," she continued, softly.

"Oh, Viola, it's wonderful! And I'd nearly given up hoping! I'm so glad that you'll see him, my dear."

"Yes, but when he comes I shall go. You won't want me then."

She was smiling.

"Oh, you mustn't go till we do. We shall all travel back together directly he's rested. He'll want to stay a few days, perhaps, and see Venice, if he's well enough. But we must get home as soon as we can—I owe that to Bethnell. He wants to see Esmé again just as much as I do, in his own queer way."

Lady Bethnell lost no time in making preparations for her son's arrival. He could not possibly come for another three weeks, nevertheless she was in a frenzy of anticipatory fuss from the moment she received her husband's letter. Viola entered wholeheartedly into these unnecessary activities, although she secretly dreaded Esmé's arrival. She felt sure

that he wouldn't like her now. She was young and ignorant, and he was a man of the world, accomplished, experienced. She pictured him blasé, indifferent, bent perhaps on making a brilliant and ambitious marriage. It might even be that he had forgotten her altogether. A child he had once played with, bullied, patronized. . . . "Not half a bad little kid . . ." She wondered if Lady Bethnell in her letters had mentioned the fact that Viola Hudson was traveling with her.

But whether he liked her or not, his coming would sound the inevitable knell of departure.

CHAPTER IV

ESME arrived late one night. Viola had gone to bed, but her room was near the entrance hall, and she heard the stir of footsteps and voices, the thud of boxes, the slight commotion that signified his arrival. She was glad, on the whole, not to be obliged to witness the meeting between him and his mother. She was wakeful and could not sleep, and a kind of excitement possessed her. Her thoughts flowed around Esmé, but always it was the boy she had once known who possessed them, not the man whom she had never seen, and who seemed an even greater stranger because of that early intimacy.

Of course, she would find him greatly altered. He must know now, however, that she was with Lady Bethnell; he would pretend at any rate that he remembered her. She began to wish that she had left before he came. They wouldn't want her now. Lady Bethnell never wanted anyone in the world when she had her adored son with her. She would regret too, perhaps, that she had said cer-

tain things—things that it was almost embarrassing for Viola to remember.

Esmé . . . not a bad little kid. She didn't yell when she fell down and hurt herself . . . Viola smiled a little grimly. She still didn't yell when she was hurt.

She tossed from side to side. She wished she could postpone her meeting with Esmé. Perhaps he would be annoyed to find her there. When morning dawned she was almost feverish from want of sleep. She sprang out of bed, and looked at herself anxiously in an old cloudy Venetian mirror that generally softened and flattered the face she offered to it. But this morning her pale ghost-like aspect with the dark-rimmed eyes annoyed her. She was angry with herself for letting Esmé's arrival give her a sleepless night. She went across hastily to the window and flung it open. It was a clear beautiful day, very still and chill, with a hint of Alpine snows in the air. Opposite to her, the row of fine old palaces was reflected in the Canal, with all their gray and gold and rose-colored tints. Already the gondolas were astir. She wondered what Esmé would think of it all, whether its loveliness would appeal to him. He had always been capricious in his tastes, often admiring things and people that to her had seemed quite ugly.

She dressed and went down into the little garden, feeling a sudden longing for fresh air. The scent of the roses mingled deliciously with the cool brackish wind. She wondered if Esmé was still asleep. What he would say to her when they did meet. Perhaps they would not see each other until the mid-day meal. It would be quite easy to keep out of his way until then. Especially, as it was Sunday. Lady Bethnell wouldn't be likely to accompany Viola to Mass that morning. She would want to be with her son, petting him, unwisely adoring him. . . .

As she walked to St. Mark's that morning, Viola could not help hoping that Lady Bethnell had been discreet in what she had said of her to Esmé. But supposing she had said: "Viola's a very pretty girl and I'm quite devoted to her. But you must remember that she's a Catholic and has very little money." Did mothers ever say things like that to their sons? More probably she had only said in her careless, blunt way: "Viola Hudson is with me. You remember the little girl at Ardlesham? You used to play with her sometimes." She could picture Esmé frowning a little and saying, "Viola? Viola? Yes, I think I do remember the name." So much water had flowed beneath the bridges since then, that it was unlikely he would recollect more than the mere name.

She lingered a little in St. Mark's when High Mass was over. The singing had thrilled her. There had been a great number of tourists of all nations present, and Viola had found a quiet remote corner where she could remain unseen and attentive in the shadows. The prospect of returning almost immediately to her old life in Percival's house at South Kensington seemed less attractive than ever. She would need all her new strength and fervor to make a success of it. She wanted to do her duty by the children, Lionel and Margery. She must show Cecily that these few months of pure pleasure hadn't done her harm. When she rose from her knees she felt oddly comforted. Yes, it had been beautiful, and she had enjoyed every hour of her Venetian life. She seemed to be saying good-bye to it. If Esmé proved in a hurry to get back to Ardlesham, they might leave on the morrow. Lady Bethnell never studied her own convenience where her son was concerned.

When Viola came out from the cool shadows into the bright blinding glare of the Piazza, she saw

Lady Bethnell and Esmé walking toward her. He was perhaps unusually tall, and when he lifted his hat she saw that his hair was still as thick and crinkly as ever, though it was no longer so flaxen-fair. His green eyes looked strangely light, set in that deeply tanned face. With that brown face he should have had dark eyes and hair. She would not have known him again except perhaps for the peculiar color of his eyes. Otherwise he had completely changed, and indeed he looked old for his two and twenty years. She went up to them, perfectly cool and unembarrassed, now that the moment had actually come, and held out her hand to him.

"We do know each other, don't we?" she said, with a smile.

She looked adorably pretty.

"But of course we do," said Esmé. "I was wondering if you'd remember me—you were such a very little girl in those days."

He smiled at her, and his face when he smiled was very pleasant and lost the rather hard, determined look she had noticed upon it at first.

Lady Bethnell took her hand.

"Viola's been the dearest little companion to me," she said, affectionately.

They walked in silence toward St. Mark's.

"You've been to Mass, of course, Viola?" said Lady Bethnell, presently.

"Yes."

"Oh, I remember you were brought up a Catholic," said Esmé. "I remember I used to chaff you about having to go to confession. All the same, I was jolly glad I hadn't got to go myself."

"Poor Miss Malleson was quite fanatical," said Lady Bethnell. "I fully expected dear Viola would give up all that when she was released from her control."

Viola said almost coldly, "It isn't a thing one can give up."

She looked up sharply at Esmé as she spoke, for, tall as she was, he stood nearly a head above her. She thought that his eyes had the clear green look of sea-water just where the wave is about to break into foam. They held her fascinated. It was this very peculiarity that made her see now with a kind of fatal distinctness the boy Esmé in this strange man. It linked the two personalities together. Would he still hurt her carelessly and then praise her for not crying out? "You'd have got me into a row if you'd yelled. The old man's in an awful wax with me to-day." He had always had a finely cultivated instinct of self-preservation. . . .

Looking back, it was rather wonderful to find that the memory of his charm should have so survived across the more sinister impression of his egoism. But it had survived, and it made their meeting a significant one for her.

He had played an important part in that rather loveless child-life of hers. After her aunt's death, when she had left Ardlesham, she had missed him fiercely, even painfully. And yet their friendship had not been a smooth or equable one. That episode, for instance, when she had fallen from a high branch of a tree they had been forbidden to climb. Her bleeding arm and grazed knees, and cut forehead. Her silence while Esmé roughly staunched the wounds, dipping his handkerchief in a stream. The stealthy conveying of her home, out of sight of his father. The whipping subsequently administered by Miss Malleson at the sight of a ruined frock, regardless of the child's considerable injuries. It all stood out clearly in her memory. She hadn't told Esmé about the whipping.

They made a brief tour of the church, just to give Esmé a glimpse of the exquisite decoration of those incomparable mosaics, flaming like dim jewels in that subdued light. Viola had made a fairly close

study of them and could answer his questions accurately and without hesitation. Once when they had become accidentally separated from Lady Bethnell, he turned to her suddenly and said:

"It's awful luck finding you here. I hope my mother hasn't been too exacting?"

"She's been everything that is most kind," whispered Viola.

"I'm glad of that," said Esmé.

Presently they left St. Mark's and went across the Piazza toward the Riva degli Schiavoni. It was a day of pearl and fiery opal; the lagoon was like a vast milky lake under a colorless sky.

Viola gathered from their conversation that Esmé was in a hurry to return to Ardlesham; after his prolonged Eastern exile his nostalgia was all for England. Venice was beautiful, but he didn't want Venice just then. He wanted the gray English skies, the drip of rain, the meadows deep in grass and flowers, the cuckoo calling from copse and woodland, the dim sheets of wild hyacinths spreading their fragrant carpet.

Ardlesham! Viola felt she would have minded leaving Venice far, far less if she too had been going back to Ardlesham. She seemed to see the old gray Tudor house with its stone mullioned windows, its setting of dim woods, its spreading lawns, and summer riot of roses.

"And you must have seen everything there is to be seen here, ages ago, haven't you, Mum?" he said, linking his arm in Lady Bethnell's.

"My dear boy, I want to do exactly what suits you best!"

"And Ardlesham suits me best at this moment. Miss Hudson—"he hesitated a little before pronouncing the name, as if it were unfamiliar to him—"will think me a Philistine."

"You mustn't call her 'Miss Hudson'—her name's

‘Viola.’ ” Lady Bethnell glanced at them. She felt proud of them both, of their good looks, their air of distinction, their splendid height.

“Viola, then. I was half afraid—” He looked at Viola and smiled. “I shouldn’t dare bully you now,” he added.

“Oh, I’m quite used to being bullied,” she said, laughing.

“Where do you live now? Where’s your home? You disappeared altogether, I remember, after Miss Malleson died.”

“I live in London with my brother Percival.”

A mental picture of the big gloomy house in South Kensington rose before her eyes. Soon its great front door would open to receive her. It would be like going back to prison, to a subterranean prison, after this delicious sojourn in the upper air.

“Judging by your face,” he remarked, “I should say it wasn’t a particularly joyful spot.”

“It isn’t,” she acknowledged. “This has been a divine holiday, and I’m afraid I shall hate London more than ever when I go back to it. I have never cared for London.”

Esmé wished that his mother would invite Viola down to Ardlesham; he meant to suggest it a little later on. It would be quite pleasant reconstructing the past with this exquisitely beautiful young creature. And as Lady Bethnell was obviously very much attached to her—she often took these fancies to young girls as if to compensate herself for her own lack of daughters—he felt that he would have no difficulties to encounter.

But here he was entirely wrong. Lady Bethnell would have given her son the shoes from her feet if they had been of any use to him; but to invite a penniless Catholic girl to the house and thus to encourage a friendship between these two eminently attractive young persons, did not come, in her opin-

ion, within the normal range of possibilities. Besides, there was that girl living near Ardlesham whom she sincerely hoped Esmé would marry. It was partly on this account that she had striven so valiantly with her husband to secure his return to England that summer. Isolde Clethorpe was the orphan niece of old Sir Timothy Clethorpe, whose estate adjoined theirs. She was enormously wealthy, quite young, and, for an heiress, good-looking. No parents to interfere. Lady Bethnell wouldn't have liked Esmé to be pestered with "in-laws." An uncle hardly counted; besides, she had sounded him and he was quite in favor of the match, if the "young people" should take a fancy to each other.

Esmé was in happy ignorance of this maternal design to deprive him of his liberty. Later on when they were alone he remembered to suggest to his mother that she should invite Viola to Ardlesham. "I feel my coming here has shortened her holiday, and I think we ought to make it up to her," he added, mendaciously.

"Your father is more disagreeable than ever about visitors, unless they are very old friends."

"Well, Viola is a very old friend," he remarked.

Lady Bethnell shook her head.

"Not in his sense. I don't expect he even remembers her existence."

Esmé felt ruffled at her refusal, and he was convinced, from her manner of dismissing the subject, that however much she liked having Viola Hudson as a companion in Venice, she did not feel the slightest eagerness to welcome her to Ardlesham as a guest. But he did not pursue the subject. To betray any eagerness would be a false move, revealing an interest in the girl that would be little likely to elicit parental approval. They were anxious he should marry of course, but it must preferably be someone of their own choice. Rich, well-

born, charming, and a member of the Church of England like the servants . . . the housekeeper had orders not to admit any of alien religions. An obscure incident of the dismissal of a gardener's boy who was suddenly discovered to be a Papist, floated nebulously through Esmé's brain. Like his mother, he rather wondered why Viola hadn't given up all that sort of thing once she was released from the tyrannous rule of Miss Malleson. He remembered the elderly aunt quite well, an alarming tight-lipped lady who, when he had brought the child hastily home with bruised knees and cut forehead and torn raiment, had only observed ominously: "Viola knows the consequences of disobedience." It had made him feel slightly uncomfortable. Discipline in the 'eighties was more rigorous than it is to-day, and even for that remote epoch Miss Malleson's interpretation of it was old-fashionedly severe. She regarded Viola's fearless, obstinate spirit as a dangerous one that must be subdued at any cost. Esmé had gone away feeling conscience-stricken and rather miserable. He, the chief offender, escaped scot-free, although Miss Malleson's grim glance had convinced him of guilt. Well, it had all happened more than seven years ago, and Viola had emerged quite wonderfully from the chrysalis condition of childhood. What a success she would be in India! Such beauty and grace as that, could never pass unnoticed. He sighed . . .

During luncheon that day he turned to her suddenly and said:

"Do you remember the day we climbed the cedar tree and you fell off and hurt yourself?"

"Yes. Do you?" She smiled delightedly. He wasn't going to pretend then that he had forgotten those childish escapades.

"I hustled you home because I was so afraid my father would see you. I got off scot-free. And your

aunt was very angry—I hated yielding you up to her tender mercies.”

“It was the last time she whipped me,” said Viola soberly; “she was taken ill the following week.”

All that part of her life was etched indelibly in her memory. The sudden illness, the hushed house, her own loneliness when no one had time to consider her at all, much less to scold and punish her. Then the being taken one morning into the big bedroom, scene of so much retribution, to see Miss Malleson lying there, pale, motionless, changed, with candles burning at each side of the bed. Her first sight of death—always a momentous moment for an imaginative, impressionable child. She was told to kneel down and pray. She had obeyed, but all the time she had an imperative longing to flee from those dumb closed lips, those sightless eyes, those pale clasped hands . . . She felt a strange fear of her even in death. Then came the funeral, the journey to Woolwich under the care of George, who seemed such a stranger although he was her own brother. Then the new home, the new scenes, the neglect, the loneliness, until Percival had suggested they should send her to a convent school. She had been very happy there.

Esmé had unconsciously linked that part of her life with the present. She had only once seen him since the episode of the torn frock on the day when she had gone up to say good-by to the Bethnells. And he had kissed her—he had seemed sorry for her.

So they were not strangers. There was that past remembered intimacy of shared adventures and misfortunes and absurd fantastic pleasures wherein Esmé had always been the leader, and Viola the submissive, obedient little follower.

“I always rest for an hour after lunch,” observed Lady Bethnell, as she rose from the table; “I don’t sleep, of course.”

Esme laughed. "Of course you don't, old dear," he said, twining his arm about her. "You needn't tell us that. No self-respecting person ever admits to sleeping in the day-time. But while you're resting, I hope Viola will come out with me in a gondola."

It was a bold suggestion, and Viola was taken by surprise. She glanced swiftly at Lady Bethnell, who was not unaware of the eager appeal in the girl's eyes.

"I'm sure she will. You mustn't lose this lovely afternoon. And you've so little time."

Esmé must really have all he asked—in reason—to-day, the first day of his visit. Lady Bethnell felt that she must not spoil his evident pleasure in seeing Viola again. They would be going back to Ardlesham so soon, that there was really no time for any harm to be done. Viola would soon pass utterly out of his life.

Esmé breathed a sigh of relief. He had fully expected opposition and was astonished that none was forthcoming. He would spend the whole afternoon on the lagoon with Viola. It was an enchanting prospect.

"Shall we start at half past two? Will that be too early for you?" he asked.

"Oh, I shall be ready," said Viola.

CHAPTER V

THE May afternoon was very warm. The waters of the lagoon sparkled as if millions of diamonds had been scattered upon them.

Viola wore a white coat and skirt, with a straw hat tilted over her brow in a bygone mode. Be-

neath the hat her dark thick hair showed luxuriantly.

"If we have any disastrous adventures to-day," said Esmé, "there's no one to punish us." He smiled, showing very even white teeth.

They sat together under the awning, watching the perfect poise and movements of the gondolier.

Suddenly Viola said: "You've made me think of Ardlesham. I've never been back there."

"Some day you must come," said Esmé.

"I hated my childhood after my mother died," said Viola. "Did you ever hate yours?"

"Oh, no, I had a decent time enough," said Esmé, slightly surprised at the confession. "My mother always spoilt me. She never cared what I did as long as it didn't come to my father's ears. What discipline for a boy! And it's just the same now."

"It must be lovely having a mother," said Viola. "Mine died when I was six. I can remember her quite well, for I was always with her, and she was so wonderful. I used to cry for her long after I went to live with Miss Malleeson."

He looked at her. "How awfully rough on you. You were rather a forlorn little kid, I remember. But you'd got heaps of pluck—nothing seemed to scare you."

"Yes, I wasn't afraid, even of Aunt Hope. I seemed to realize she was trying to do her duty. And, after all, she did what she could for me. She brought me up a Catholic, and she left me all the money she had. Not a great deal, you know—but still something."

"And you've stuck to being a Catholic?" he said.

"Yes. I'm grateful to her for that," said Viola, softly.

Esmé paused for a moment, and then said almost indignantly: "Still, she'd absolutely no right. . . . Another person's child!"

"She only took me on that condition. And no

one else wanted me." She made the simple little statement without bitterness. "She was my father's aunt, and she was hard and despotic but very upright and conscientious. She was a convert, and had suffered a good deal when she became a Catholic—I think that made her hard."

"Whatever her treatment of you may have been, it's turned out all right," said Esmé. His look was full of flattery, and the tones of his voice had become suddenly low and tender. "You were a darling little girl, Viola. But I never thought you'd grow up into anything so perfectly lovely."

"Oh, nonsense, I'm nothing of the kind," she said, resenting something in his manner that seemed almost too intimate and familiar. She felt, too, that Lady Bethnell would certainly disapprove of such direct compliments.

"And, then, you've completely won the old lady's heart," he added.

"I'm so glad you think she likes me. I'm devoted to her."

"Yes, she's an old dear, isn't she? She's won my everlasting devotion by being the most injudicious parent in the world." Esmé secretly wondered, as he said this, how far her indulgence could be counted upon if he announced his intention of making an imprudent marriage. With someone like Viola Hudson, for instance.

She was beginning to take shape in his thoughts as the woman he had always wished to marry. But that religion of hers . . . Such an unnecessary stumbling-block. And yet it was almost the only thing about Miss Malleeson that she didn't seem either to regret or resent.

"I really don't see any necessity for going home at once, after all," he said, presently. "I might just as well see the place thoroughly while I am here."

And I don't feel nearly so homesick for Ardlesham as I did."

"Won't your father mind?" she said, doubtfully.

The change in his attitude was sudden enough to arouse conjecture, but, then, he had always been capricious.

"He may be rather passionate at first, but that'll soon blow over. And in the meantime we can have a simply ripping time together here, Viola."

So it was for her sake that he wished to stay. She had begun to suspect it, and now his words had made it quite clear. The renewal of the old friendship was perhaps beginning to disclose a sweetness that he had not anticipated. But Viola saw things differently. She was afraid both for herself and for him. She sat there in silence, troubled and perplexed, and yet with a strange secret happiness in her heart.

The gondola skimmed swiftly over the surface of the water. Heavy, almost clumsy, as it was, it responded like a sentient thing to that solitary guide with his single oar. They were passing now through narrow intricate canals, spanned by white bridges, where torrents of roses flowed over the walls of ancient palaces that rose sheer from the jade-green water. Overhead they could see narrow blue spaces of sky, pierced perhaps by a slim tower leaning faintly aslant as do so many of the church towers of Venice. Then out once more upon the broad pale bosom of the lagoon, dotted near and far with islands smothered in their gay spring verdure. It was an unreal world, a place of phantasy, beautiful as a dream. It was the very setting for Viola, enhancing her loveliness, bestowing a touch of romance upon this meeting of the two old playmates.

There were forces at work with which Lady Bethnell had not reckoned.

Once Viola suggested that they ought to return.

But Esmé shook his head. His enjoyment of the hour was far too exquisite, and he was determined not to shorten it. If his mother proved obdurate they might even leave Venice on the morrow. And once in England it would not be so easy for him to see Viola again.

"Tell me what you're thinking of," said Esmé, suddenly.

"When people ask me that, it drives every thought out of my head," she answered, laughing.

"I wanted you to be thinking how perfectly lovely this is!"

"Well, perhaps I was!"

"We might go out again after dinner," said Esmé; "there'll be a moon. Would you like that? Would you come, Viola?"

"I should like it, but I'm afraid your mother wouldn't venture—she's afraid of chills—we haven't been in a gondola once at night."

"Oh, she wouldn't be likely to come," said Esmé. "Besides, I want to go alone with you."

"I don't think she'd care for us to leave her again," said Viola, lamely. Her tone was harassed by doubt. While she wished to be absolutely loyal to Lady Bethnell, she was aware that Esmé was beginning to make this difficult of accomplishment. He seemed to take it for granted that their old childish friendship was to be resumed, bridging over in a few hours the seven years of separation. But—he must not fall in love with her, nor wish to marry her. Lady Bethnell had made the situation so clear and explicit, long before the question of his coming to Venice had arisen. She must remember those words—almost of warning. Lady Bethnell had a real affection for her, nevertheless she had shown her that such a marriage was impossible. Absurd, perhaps, to be considering the matter seriously after a few hours of renewed acquaintance, still something

in Esmé's manner had forced it upon her. And she could only remember that he had been the hero of all her childish dreams. She had loved him, as a little girl. Why shouldn't she love him now in all the splendor of his early manhood? . . .

"We must ask your mother's permission," she said. She felt certain that Lady Bethnell would veto the plan. And again that growing sense of disloyalty possessed her. "She shan't come between us—she shan't separate us," she thought.

"Must we? You wouldn't go without?" he asked. His indolent voice was very attractive.

"Of course not. How could I?"

"Such things have been done," said Esmé.

"You mustn't ask me to go against your mother," she said, firmly.

She was adorable, he thought, with this little touch of primness, of determination.

Had she been born thirty years later, Viola would have welcomed the little plan without questioning its feasibility, or recognizing the right of anyone to veto it. A moonlight voyaging on the lagoon would have been achieved without comment. But the stir that made for the emancipation of women from the old chains, was then only manifesting itself sporadically. A voice here and there could be heard perhaps, uplifted in pitiful and isolated protest. Viola was not of these. She had been brought up in a conventional school, and she still retained a wholesome respect for the opinions of others.

"You're really making me believe in the efficacy of Miss Malleeson's system of education!" he told her, laughing.

"*Viola knows the consequences of disobedience!*" She mimicked the ominous little phrase. It was rather hard on the dead woman, but she wanted to divert Esmé's thoughts to another channel.

"There'd be no consequences now—unless you

caught a cold. And that would only help to defer our journey!"

"You must ask Lady Bethnell. If she says 'yes,' I'll come. There is really no reason why we shouldn't go."

He had to be satisfied. But he knew quite well that to go to his mother with that request on his lips would only serve to arouse afresh her suspicions. She might not say anything to him—she was too cautious for that—but she might say something very much to the point to Viola. And as she had brought the girl with her from England as a kind of unpaid companion, she enjoyed a certain authority.

He could almost hear the agonized maternal cluckings. It was rather absurd to return home to this measure of tutelage after those long free years in India when he had done exactly as he chose.

But Venice and moonlight . . . and Viola. It was as nearly perfect as imagination could paint. He felt inclined to say with Browning:

Earth being so good, would heaven seem best?

Sitting there with that detached, almost brooding, look on her face, she seemed in a sense unaware of him. He wished he could have known those thoughts of hers. And he would have liked her to show much more eagerness in his little plan. Not to be quite so insistent about this question of permission. But that religion of hers naturally tended to make her scrupulous and conscientious. It was characteristic of Esmé that he never considered the Catholic Church apart from the confessional—that was to him its single salient feature. And when he thought of that, it was with something of recoil.

When Esmé said at dinner that night: "Viola and I are contemplating a trip by moonlight on the

lagoon," Lady Bethnell gave the girl a quick, curious glance, as if she half suspected her of having originated the suggestion.

Like a parent bird she discerned danger from afar.

"I am certainly not going to risk rheumatism in my aged limbs," she observed, dryly.

"Of course you're not, you darling old thing! We're going alone—just as we did this afternoon. I assure you the gondolier makes a most efficient chaperon."

Esmé's green eyes danced. All his life his mother had known the meaning of that sudden gleam. He would take his pleasure regardless of consequence, and in the subsequent concealment of his delinquency she, most ironically, had to assist him. She choked back her disapproval, inwardly condemning Viola for having encouraged the scheme.

"Well, I hope you'll both enjoy it," she said.

She was wounded, too, that he showed so little desire for her society. Quite obviously he wished to be with Viola. Well, there was no help for it. And they would be starting for England almost at once. The affair could quite easily be nipped in the bud.

Nevertheless, she had a word with Esmé after dinner when they were alone. "My dear boy—do mind what you're about. Of course, there's no one to see you and gossip . . . but Viola's in my care."

Esmé put his arms round her neck, kissing, cajoling her.

"Why, I've known her since she was a tiny kid. It's been like meeting a long-lost sister!"

"Has it?" Her tone was indescribably dry. "You must get Viola to accept that fraternal attitude, then."

"Viola is eminently teachable!" His eyes danced. But his aspect spelt mischief.

"Oh, my dear boy—I hoped you had learnt wisdom in India."

"So I have. I've come out of it alive and free. Few can say as much! After nearly three years of it I'm still unmarried!"

"I won't have you make Viola unhappy."

"That's the last thing I'd care to do." His tone was suddenly serious. "I say, Mum, why didn't you tell me she was so beautiful?"

"I never think in those exaggerated terms. Viola is a nice, fresh-looking girl."

He groaned. "Why, she's perfect! That brow of hers—"

Lady Bethnell concealed with an effort the perturbation of spirit aroused by his words. But it was her own fault. She had brought them together. She ought to have obeyed her own instinct and despatched Miss Hudson home the moment she knew that her son was coming.

"I'm so glad you're so fond of her," he added.

"I have always taken an interest in Viola since she was a little girl."

"That's why I want you to be very kind and ask her down to Ardlesham." His voice was very soft and persuasive.

"I must see. Things are a little different, now you're both grown up. I let you play together when you were children because she was such a lonely little thing and I always thought Miss Malleson was too severe with her. But now—" She looked at her son almost appealingly. Surely he must understand, without her telling him, that it would be both imprudent and unwise for him to show particular attention now to an ineligible girl.

He had only been a few hours in Venice and yet he was apparently bent on embarking upon a foolish flirtation that obviously could come to nothing.

"Don't be out too late," she said, suddenly. "You

mustn't tire Viola. She'll be busy packing to-morrow, for we shall start by the night mail."

"By the night mail!" echoed Esmé, dismayed.

"Why, of course. You said you wanted to get back to Ardlesham at once."

"But I've thought it over, and I've come to the conclusion that I'd better stay here a few days longer and see Venice thoroughly while I am about it!"

"You must consider your father. He wants you home as soon as possible!"

"He has never shown such a violent desire for my society as all that," remarked Esmé, coolly.

He got up and left her and went into the little sitting-room, where he found Viola writing. The light from a yellow-shaded lamp enveloped her with a soft golden glow; it illuminated her hair, and the delicate profile, which was all that he could see of her face.

He advanced toward her almost stealthily.

"I don't believe she likes our going a little bit," he said, carelessly.

Viola laid down her pen. She was writing to Cecily to tell her that she would probably arrive home in a few days' time. Something of the depression she felt at the prospect showed in her face.

"Oh, then let's give it up. I hate annoying people."

After all, she owed a great deal to Lady Bethnell for giving her this radiant glimpse of another world.

"Well, you'd annoy me frightfully if you refused to come," said Esmé, drawing up a chair and sitting so that he could see her with the golden light falling on her face.

"That wouldn't matter," said Viola, smiling.

"Don't let's waste this perfect hour with useless argument. Do you mean to come or not?" His voice held an alluring tone. Just like that, he had always encouraged her to follow him into primrose

paths of forbidden pleasures. But he was irresistible now as he had been then. She answered coldly: "Very well, I'll come."

She left unfinished the letter to Cecily.

CHAPTER VI

VIOLA put on a close-fitting hat, and enveloped herself, for she was wearing a thin evening dress, in a huge white Venetian shawl. When she appeared arrayed thus, she looked almost phantom-like with her pale cameo face, her dark eyes. Excitement had tinged her cheeks. Her eyes were very bright. Esmé gazed at her approvingly.

"You look ripping in all that white stuff," he said.

They went downstairs. The porter opened the great *portone* for them to pass through. Outside, the *fondamenta* was very narrow, there was but a step or two between them and the water. They could hear the rhythmic swish of it against the stones. Here in the shadow of the old palace it was ebony-colored. The cool darkness of the night swam about them.

Esmé stepped down into the gondola and gave his hand to Viola, holding hers firmly while she joined him. The gondolier gave his loud, weird warning cry, and they sped under the bridge. They passed down narrow, shadow-darkened canals, emerging opposite the Giudecca, with the great dome of the Church of the Redeemer rising blackly against the moon-washed sky. They were in an ethereal world whose colors were pale silver and deep ebony, mysterious, fantastic, with a beauty that was almost terrifying.

"I'm really going to persuade my mother to stay till the end of the week," he said, at last.

Viola did not answer. Her eyes were fixed upon the wide silver lagoon that lay before them like a smooth sea.

"You'd like it too, wouldn't you? You're not in a hurry to go home?"

She laughed. "If you knew my sister-in-law you'd hardly ask me that question. And she makes me teach her two unintelligent children!"

In her heart she was rebelling against the fate that decreed her return to London. Cecily would probably exact an increased amount of work from her to make up for that prolonged holiday.

"What rough luck," he ejaculated. "Must you live there? Haven't you got enough to go off on your own?"

"When I'm twenty-one I shall be free. But I don't get the control of my money till then. And then I shall come and live in Venice forever!"

"How long have you to wait?"

"More than three years. I'm not even quite eighteen."

"Eighteen!" repeated Esmé. "But I don't fancy, somehow, you'll be free in the way you mean in three years' time."

She turned her face toward him. She had taken off her hat, and the sea-wind stirred the heavy dark hair above her brow.

"I mean—you'll probably be married before that time comes."

"I don't think so."

"You've never met anyone?"

"No one."

"But of course you will," said Esmé, with a kind of careless tenderness in his voice.

She leaned back in an almost somnolent content, thinking: "This is happiness. Being here like this with Esmé. Yesterday I never dreamed of such happiness. But of course it won't last."

Yes, it had come upon her, this extraordinary bliss, with a suddenness that was almost violent. It was rapidly changing the face of the world. She had believed herself perfectly happy with Lady Bethnell before Esmé came; now she could hardly believe that it had been happiness at all, so flaccid and colorless did it seem in comparison with these hours of fantastic joy. She believed, too, that Esmé was beginning to love her. Viola, without being in the least vain, was aware of her own beauty, and for the first time the knowledge gave her a sense of power. This man might learn to love her for her beauty. And as love could triumph over prudence, he might even ask her to be his wife . . . this cool, careless Esmé, with his pride, his touch of conscious arrogance, his easy egoism.

"I am sure you will," he continued. "And it's because I'm afraid that I'm so sure."

"Afraid?" She was genuinely puzzled.

"Yes. I shouldn't like my little playmate to belong to someone else. I should never think anyone quite good enough for you, Viola."

She did not answer. In the stillness of that pale world of water and sky she seemed to be alone with Esmé as in some beautiful passionate dream. She would have been quite happy had they remained in silence. Even the conversation of Esmé disturbed her a little, though she liked listening to his voice.

He gave an order to the gondolier. They were approaching an island, drawn in shadowy silhouette, with a row of gleaming lights along the little quay.

"We'll get off here and go for a walk," said Esmé.

"No, no," said Viola, "it'll make us too late."

Esmé laughed.

"What does it matter how late we are?" he said.

They landed and walked down a road that led to the sea. Above their heads the trees met, interlacing their boughs. Viola had been to the Lido several

times with Lady Bethnell, but always in broad daylight. She could not have believed that it could ever seem as now the very island of romance, although in those days it had not become a fashionable bathing resort with giant hotels and long lines of bathing huts. The wash of the sea sounded rhythmically, and presently they came in sight of it, lying there like a dark shadow against the sky, pricked here and there by the red lights of fishing vessels. The cool wind touched her face as she stood by Esmé's side, watching the little waves curling as they broke on the sands with a tiny glittering rim of foam.

Esmé linked his hand in her arm. Suddenly he bent his head and kissed her. She felt like a little child again, lifting her face to Esmé to be kissed. But he moved away from her abruptly, as if that momentary contact had been an impulse he now regretted. Viola was chilled at the sudden withdrawal. She felt as if her heart had always unconsciously been Esmé's. Boy and man she had loved him. What did it matter that he had only returned to her that day after their long separation?

"You must forgive me, Viola," he said, coldly, "I was thinking of the old days at Ardlesham. But we're too old now to play at being brother and sister."

"Yes," she said, in a cool, proud tone. His suggestion of regret chilled and shamed her. She had counted too much upon the survival of his love.

"It was so splendid finding you here," he added. "Like old times."

He turned away from the sea, and Viola followed, keeping this time just a little behind him. She watched the long easy strides, the lissom athletic body, strong and fit, moving before her.

The moon was high in the sky, clear and splendid in her frosty majesty, with the stars, her bright courtiers, a glittering company intricately patterned.

The sea-wind blowing in from the Adriatic sighed over the island, whispering among the trees. Far off the towers of Venice were etched softly in mist-colored silhouettes, with the lights of the city lying below them.

Esmé helped her once more into the gondola and they went home in silence. Not a word was said until they reached the palace. They mounted the wide marble stairs in silence. Esmé fitted his latch-key into the door. He opened it, and Viola passed through. She seemed to him a white majestic figure, aloof, offended.

"Are you angry with me?" he said, going up to her.

"Not in the least. We were both very foolish."

Her dark eyes were stern, they surveyed him with a cold scrutiny.

"But you must forgive me—for being foolish," he said.

"Don't let's discuss it, please." Her tone was frosty.

She felt guilty toward Lady Bethnell, as if she had somehow betrayed her kindness by permitting Esmé to make love to her. But she had wanted his love. She had felt certain that some acknowledgment of love would follow that kiss. Not that sudden withdrawal, that dismayed silence, as if he had immediately recognized his own indiscreet imprudence. His love had touched her for a second with its shining wing . . . and had passed on. That was all she would ever know of it. That one kiss, with the cold sea and the pale moon watching them on that deserted island shore. Her heart rebelled afresh against that dour decree of separation.

"Good-night," she said.

Her hand hardly touched his. She vanished wraith-like down the long passage that led to her room. The hall clock was striking one. He hoped

that his mother was not aware of their late return.

Viola cried a little when she reached her room. She was tired, and overwrought with all the cumulative excitement of the day. She dimly guessed that just at the very moment when Esmé kissed her he had recognized the impossibility for him of such a marriage. He must have envisaged, perhaps for the first time, the strenuous opposition that his parents would undoubtedly display toward such a project. Divided and antagonistic as they were, they would present a united front before a threatened catastrophe of the kind. And some thought such as this, it must have been, that had made him recoil almost too hastily, almost too visibly, as though from the embrace of a sorceress. Viola was stung and humiliated by that shrinking gesture, it had cut her like a whip. She wept over that wound to her pride. And yet she was to blame. She had always known what Lady Bethnell would think of an engagement between herself and Esmé. She should therefore have been on her guard. Instead of which she had surrendered herself to the glamor of the moment, the moonlight, the whispering sea, Esmé's face bending down toward her own. . . .

She did not sleep, but lay awake thinking of him. Of course it was not to be expected that he would make sacrifices for her, he who in all his life had never made sacrifices for anyone. The egoism of the spoilt, proud, wilful boy was undiminished. Indeed, she perceived that all the salient points of his boyish character were now crystallized and accentuated, the pride, the selfishness, the touch of meanness visible in an exaggerated sense of self-preservation, the easy enjoyment of the moment, with its disregard of consequences, the complete indifference to the sufferings of others. Meanness—the word hurt her, with its deliberate and brutal smirching of the idol. Yes, but

there had always been that attitude: "As long as my father doesn't get to hear of it . . . of course I mustn't get into a row."

But no more now than it had done when she was a little girl did this slightly sinister attribute diminish her own worshiping love. He was a young god who must not be judged by worldly standards. Yet tonight she thought she could feel the wheels of his triumphal car passing over her heart, grinding it to dust.

She avoided both mother and son until the mid-day breakfast on the following morning. Then she went into the little *salotto*, dressed in a cool summer frock of pink cambric. Lady Bethnell had given it to her some weeks before with the kindly words: "My dear—I like to see you in pink!" She was so slim that the rather full, bunchy skirt of that period did not detract from the slender grace of her form.

Lady Bethnell and her son were sitting side by side near the open window. The cool breeze from the Grand Canal—that broad river of Venice—flowed into the room.

"Good-morning, Lady Bethnell. Good-morning, Esmé."

Esmé had risen and came toward her with a curious light in his eyes.

"My dear, why didn't you come out with us?" said Lady Bethnell.

"Oh, I was lazy after our midnight excursion," replied Viola, carelessly. Her eyes did not meet Esmé's.

"I hope you didn't take cold. The night air of Italy is very treacherous."

Viola shook her head. "No—I've no excuse but sheer laziness."

Esmé looked at her with admiration. What a wife she would make! She had such grit—there would be no crying over trifles if things didn't go

quite smoothly. That austere bringing up of hers had tempered her character to a fine steel. And dimly across his own exaggerated self-esteem he felt that she would make a better man of him, should she ever become his wife. She stirred within him vague impulses toward self-sacrifice. He wished that he possessed something worth having, not for himself, but so that he might lay it at her feet.

They sat down to luncheon. It was a typical Italian meal, a *risotto* with little surprises such as cocks' combs and scraps of the liver of chickens concealed in it; some sliced veal with new potatoes and green peas; small roasted chickens served with salad. Cheese, fruit and coffee followed. Esmé praised the food and wine, and his mother looked delighted at his approval.

"I have taken our tickets for to-morrow night," announced Lady Bethnell, toward the close of the meal.

"You haven't!" There was dismay and even a touch of anger in Esmé's voice. "Why, I haven't half seen Venice. I wanted to stay another week. We can change the tickets, though, and send a telegram to Dad."

"Oh, but Esmé—"

"Oh, but Mum!" He mocked her with lips and eyes.

"Your father will be seriously annoyed. And after cabling for you—"

"Oh, yes, I know all that. But if we wire to-day, that'll give him lots of time to get over his wrath!"

"Esmé—it isn't treating him fairly!"

He looked at her and laughed ironically. There was malice in his green eyes.

"Are you really beginning to consider his feelings at last?" he inquired.

A dull flush came into Lady Bethnell's face. She

deserved the shaft, nevertheless it had hurt her. But it was not the first time that Esmé had reminded her of her own attitude toward his father when she had ventured to preach filial obedience. But now—in front of Viola, too!—

Why was he so anxious to stay in Venice? On his first arrival he had seemed in a desperate hurry to return to Ardlesham, had seemed to grudge even the few hours that must necessarily elapse before a start home could be made. More than ever was she convinced that this abrupt change of front was due to Viola Hudson.

In their cool, hard indifference the young faces on each side of her offered no clue.

Lady Bethnell adored Esmé; she had believed herself also to be extremely and affectionately attached to Viola, but now they were both with her she felt almost as if a subtle antagonism—directed toward herself as to a member of an older generation—emanated from them. Their very silence showed a dislike to the preaching of duty against the claims of inclination. She had expected something of the sort from Esmé, but she had hoped better things of Viola.

Aloud she only said:

“Now you’ve come, Esmé, I feel as if I couldn’t stand this place for another day. I want to get back to my garden and the dogs.”

She could hardly remind Esmé that her quarrel with his father had originally centered on the vexed question of his own return home. He was, however, perfectly aware of the fact, and he ought therefore to be able to see that Lord Bethnell had given in very handsomely, and it was only right that he should reap the full fruit of his magnanimity.

“I suppose Viola and I could hardly stay on by ourselves!” said Esmé, perversely.

"I should think not, indeed. Viola would in any case accompany me home."

"Of course," said Viola, sweetly.

Esmé leaned toward his mother.

"Are you going to spoil my leave at the very beginning? I want to stay here—and I don't see that a week can matter, even with anyone so extraordinarily tiresome as Dad!" When he gazed at her like that, intently, his green eyes shining, Viola could not help thinking how curiously he resembled a cat, possessing, too, all a cat's mysterious obstinacy.

Lady Bethnell rose from the table.

"I must think it over. You are so capricious."

Viola followed her out of the room, leaving Esmé to smoke in solitude. When they were in the great *salone* with its four big windows looking down upon the bright waters of the Canal, Lady Bethnell said:

"You don't want to stay on, do you, Viola?"

There was a faint tentative appeal in her tone.

"I'm always ready to do whatever you wish," said Viola, evasively.

"You've not told Esmé you'd rather be here?"

"Certainly not."

"We must really leave to-morrow night," continued Lady Bethnell, nervously; "he mustn't quarrel with his father like that. I wish Esmé would learn to give way a little. He never thinks of the future. The pleasure of the moment—that's all that counts with him."

Viola said nothing, but mentally she assented. The pleasure of the moment. The truth stung her. Last night it had been his pleasure to kiss her.

"He must see Isolde Clethorpe. His father and I are both most anxious he should marry her."

Viola was beginning to detest this unknown girl. She felt that she could picture her exactly. Pretty, charming, young, with all the self-confidence that wealth and an assured position in the world can give.

"I'm sure he's only got to see her," continued Lady Bethnell, fretfully.

"Don't show him that you wish for it," said Viola, coolly. "It might set him against her."

"Yes, I think you're right. But in this case I feel sure from my knowledge of Esmé that he'll like her. And then the money—poor boy! All this dependence on his father is so galling."

"But won't dependence on a wife be even more galling?" inquired Viola.

Lady Bethnell looked at her sharply. "What strange ideas of marriage you have, my dear. When one is married one shares everything."

Viola said carelessly: "I hope he will find Miss Clethorpe accommodating!"

It hurt her to think of this wealthy, expensive little creature waiting for Esmé at Ardlesham. She would marry him for his brand new title; he would marry her for her money. Love would have nothing to say to it at all. On reflection she was almost glad of that. But both young and good-looking, possessing the same extravagant and worldly tastes, they would probably get on as well—or as badly—as most couples.

"Only, he's too good for that," thought Viola, with a little touch of savage envy.

Esmé came into the room.

"Are you coming to Murano with me this afternoon?" he said, speaking to his mother.

"No—I've had enough sight-seeing. And there's shopping to be done."

"Then I must fling myself on Viola's mercy," he said.

"I'm afraid I can't spare her this afternoon. She must come with me."

"Nonsense—you can take Pearce," he said, sitting down close to his mother. He took her hand and

fondled it. "You can't ask Viola to waste such a divine afternoon in shopping. And I hate going about alone."

"I think to-day you'll have to go alone. I really want Viola."

It was the first time Lady Bethnell had ever deliberately interfered with the girl's liberty, and the decision she now displayed was in itself indicative of maternal alarm. She had put the girl in his path, forgetting that he was not blind, and now that it was too late she was trying to prevent them from seeing too much of each other.

"Your mother is quite right, Esmé. I've really been neglecting my little duties." Viola longed to end the discussion; she felt, curiously enough, annoyed with them both.

"Oh, you're against me, too? Hard luck! I'd counted on your support."

Both women were silent. Esmé rose.

"Well, I must be going. If I'm late for dinner don't wait for me." He moved indolently toward the door. "I hope by then you'll have finished all that silly shopping." His tone was still aggrieved.

When they were alone Lady Bethnell said:

"Did you want to go? Had you planned it together?"

Viola shook her head. "I don't care in the least to go, and it was the first I'd heard of it."

It struck her as a little odd that while Lady Bethnell tried to conceal her suspicions from her son, she made no effort to hide them from Viola. Perhaps she considered she had made them too apparent, for she added, almost apologetically:

"I really don't like your running about Venice together. People might talk."

"I expect you're quite right," said Viola, icily.

CHAPTER VII

VIOLA had felt compelled to yield in the face of maternal anxiety, but it had nevertheless hurt her to refuse Esmé. He had gone away looking dejected and annoyed; probably he felt angry with her for her meekness.

And there would be little opportunity for further expeditions together. It would be useless for him to suggest another trip on the lagoon by moonlight. His mother, now eagerly on the alert, would be practically certain to veto it. It was evident that she suspected something. . . . She needn't be afraid, Viola now told herself bitterly. Esmé had already repented of his impulsive love-making.

In any case, for pride's sake, she would refuse to accompany him again. It would be like inviting a repetition of that stolen, clandestine embrace—the first she had ever received. How eager he had been to show her that it meant nothing, that it was a mere echo of the past. . . .

Lady Bethnell had also made it clear to both of them that day that Viola was her unpaid companion, from whom little services were demanded in exchange for all that she had received. She was in a dependent position. She wasn't on an equal footing with Esmé. And when she reviewed this she felt that his arrival had abruptly changed her own relations with Lady Bethnell. They were not yet enemies, but they were no longer so perfectly and harmoniously friendly. They were on their guard. Their hands were, so to speak, on their swords. The situation had lost its first simplicity. At a word from Esmé those swords would leap from their scabbards.

It was a pity, because they had now lived together for some months in great contentment, the older

woman growing fonder of the younger one day by day. She had indeed treated her with all the consideration she would have shown toward a greatly beloved daughter. And now in less than two days Esmé seemed to have destroyed that harmony, that mutual content. He had entered the old palace like a young whirlwind, upsetting everything in his egoistic impetuosity.

Outwardly the two women were still friends; inwardly they were watching each other, ready to meet move with counter move. If Esmé ever perceived it, he said nothing, nor did he let the fact disturb him. But he was beginning to be aware of how closely Viola had guarded his boyish image in her heart through all the years of separation. It was that boy, and not the stranger he had actually become, whom last night she had permitted to embrace her. He was already more than half way toward winning her love, and this knowledge gave additional zest to the situation which had, so to speak, sprung up to greet him.

"I'm not really going out shopping," said Lady Bethnell, when at the close of her siesta she sent her maid to fetch Viola.

Viola said nothing; she concealed her surprise at the frank little revelation.

"I should like you to read to me. One of those new short stories by the woman who writes under a man's name," she added.

Viola fetched the book obediently. It was only the second time that she had been called upon to read aloud. Her physical health, which was perfect, rendered her untiring. She read to Lady Bethnell through the hot hours of that brilliant May afternoon. But all the time she knew that her assiduity was but a subtle deception. To betray unwillingness or disappointment would invite comment.

Lady Bethnell was more than ever determined to

start for England on the morrow. At all costs Esmé must be removed from the danger that threatened. She was almost shocked to discover how rapidly her own attitude toward Viola had changed. But she knew that a woman when she has once resolved to win a man is a creature possessed of certain elemental powers that make her ride rough-shod over lesser affections and friendships. Swept aside like impending dust, these only discover themselves as obstacles in the path to success.

"And she knows exactly what I feel about it—I showed her my hand before Esmé ever came," she thought. "That's why she's beginning to see an enemy in me."

Lady Bethnell possessed the astute instinctive wisdom which Nature bestows upon all mothers, whether human or not, for the adequate protection of their offspring. And she, too, felt that she could sweep out of the path all dangers however beautiful and insidious. In vain did she try to comfort herself with the reflection that Esmé could not possibly be such a fool as to let himself fall seriously in love with a penniless Catholic girl. Of course she was lovely, and never had she looked so lovely as now. The touch of romance—as so often happens—had awakened her, and changed the bud to a rare blossom. She might seem outwardly careless and indifferent, but that was a pose which did not in the least deceive Lady Bethnell.

"Thank you very much—you read charmingly—you never get hoarse. Ring for tea, and then you'll have a good couple of hours in which to pack before dinner." The new note of authority was not absent from the kindly words.

Viola rang the bell. When the tea came she poured it out, adding the precise amount of sugar and milk that Lady Bethnell preferred. She waited on her with a pretty attention.

"Have you told your sister-in-law to expect you?"

Viola had neither finished nor despatched that letter.

"No—it isn't necessary. My room is always ready."

"You might find it occupied."

"Oh, no—I have the key. No one ever sleeps there when I'm away."

"Still, it would have been wiser."

"There's been so little time," said Viola. "And in any case, it's too late now."

"Perhaps," said Lady Bethnell, "you thought I should change my mind?"

"I can't remember thinking about it at all," said Viola.

"It's all nonsense—this idea of Esmé's to stay here another week."

Viola said nothing.

"I can't have him running the risk of annoying his father just for a whim!"

Tea was finished. Pearce came in and took away the tray. Viola said:

"Shall I read to you again, or would you like me to go and pack now?"

"I think you'd better pack. If you stay up late at night to finish it, you'll be so tired for the journey."

Viola's room was at the other end of the apartment. To reach it she had to cross three of the big ante-rooms. In the farthest one she suddenly perceived a man's form standing near the window. It was Esmé, and his gray-clad figure, tall, lean, upright, was silhouetted indefinitely between her and the light. Her heart beat a little quickly. She had not expected to see him back so soon. She would have avoided him had it been possible. She had indeed nearly passed him when he stretched out his hand and touched her sleeve.

"Come here, Viola," he said; "I've been waiting for you."

"No—not now—" she answered, confusedly. If Lady Bethnell should chance to come in and find them, she would certainly be jealous, suspicious and curious.

"Viola—come here—" His voice was now urgent. She went up to him.

"You might have come with me. I didn't go to Murano after all. And I've had a perfectly rotten afternoon. When did you get back? Was the shopping so very important?"

"It was so important that we didn't attempt it at all," said Viola, trying to speak lightly. "I've been reading to your mother all the afternoon."

Esmé reddened slightly. He ought to have seen through such a shallow deception. And why had his mother deceived him? Did she suspect anything?

"What on earth made you give in to her like that?" he inquired.

"While I'm with her, I must do exactly as she wishes." Her cool, careless voice piqued him.

"Then where do I come in?"

"You don't come in at all."

"That isn't true," said Esmé. "Viola, we're going on the lagoon again to-night. I won't be put off."

"If you go on the lagoon it will be alone, Esmé."

"You're to go to bed as usual—or rather pretend to. Then if you slip out at eleven you'll find me waiting in the hall."

"No," she said. "Your mother—"

"She'll be asleep by then. There's no risk at all."

She wanted to say: "But why don't you tell her frankly that you want to go?" It was, however, impossible to confront Esmé with the specter of his own egoism. It was something that, while marring his perfection, brought him a little nearer to earth.

"Viola, you thought I was fooling last night. You

were quite right to be angry. But I wasn't—" He moved closer to her. She looked at him steadily.

"You don't believe me?"

She was silent.

"They'd never hear of my marrying a girl who was a Catholic," he said, desperately.

"I know. Your mother made that quite clear to me long before there was any talk of your coming."

"Did she? But I'm of age—I can please myself."

"And live on your pay?" she inquired, coolly. "I shall have about two hundred and fifty a year when I come of age. Your parents would certainly call that being penniless. Besides, it's all settled. You are to marry Miss Isolde Clethorpe—she's rich, beautiful, everything you can wish for."

With all the will in the world, she could not keep her voice free from a certain bitterness. But Esmé was far too much amazed by the disclosure to heed this detail.

"Marry Issy Clethorpe!" he groaned.

"Yes. Why not? People may be foolish, but in the end they nearly always make suitable marriages!"

"Don't be cynical. I hate a woman to be cynical," he said, abruptly.

"I was only trying to be sensible," she said, quietly.

"You are tired," he said, with sudden compunction, noticing her unusual pallor. "Have you been on duty all the afternoon?"

"No—only since your mother finished her siesta."

"Were you going to rest now?" he asked.

"No—she sent me to do my own packing."

"She really means to go to-morrow?"

"I think so." She moved toward the door.

"Viola!"

She turned her head.

"You will come to-night, won't you?"

"Yes," said Viola, and vanished.

She was astonished at herself directly she had uttered the word, but their conversation had made her look at the matter in a new and clearer light. He had convinced her now, that he loved her. He had envisaged the obstacle of parental displeasure. He would most certainly ask her to marry him. If he loved her, the fact of her being a Catholic and practically penniless according to Bethnell standards, would have no power to deter him. Thus, there would be no harm in yielding to his request to go with him to-night. It need never come to his mother's ears, unless they told her when their engagement was an accomplished fact. Esmé had always been able to imbue Viola with a fine reckless spirit. She had always, in the old days, done his will, even when conscience disapproved and fear of consequences set her a-tremble. She had followed him blindly. But his power had never seemed so strong and vital a thing as now. She recognized that, and something of the old fear came over her. Less than ever would he care if she were hurt, so that nothing of blame should fall upon him. And his praise for her daring would be ample reward, even as it had always been. She hated herself for this secretly abject attitude.

"You must go to bed early to-night, Viola," said Lady Bethnell, at dinner. "You're looking pale, and I can't have you tired out before the journey. Esmé can play piquet with me, and I shall go to bed early myself."

She had reached the time of life when late hours not only cease to attract but are also prone to disagree with the physical health.

"Very well, Lady Bethnell," said Viola.

"There'll be so much to do to-morrow, and we

shall have to dine early so as to be in good time for our train."

"So you really mean to go?" said Esmé.

She looked at him with eyes as clear and green as his own.

"Of course I do."

After dinner when the card-table had been placed in readiness, Viola said:

"I think I shall go to my room. Good-night, Lady Bethnell,—good-night, Esmé."

Esmé went to the door and opened it for her. He looked at her as she passed out but he did not speak.

"Darling Mum—how you do bully that poor child!" he said.

Eyes and voice held a kind of whimsical reproach.

"Bully her? What on earth do you mean? I've given her the time of her life!"

"But keeping her in, all this lovely afternoon, reading to you! And sending her to bed! I wonder she doesn't rebel."

"Viola is very young and inexperienced, and she is in my charge," she reminded him.

"You are afraid," he said, boldly, "that she may trifle with my young affections!"

"I'm much more afraid that you may trifle with hers. She is a Catholic, and you could not possibly marry a Catholic, however much you might fancy yourself to be in love." She spoke severely, but her eyes softened as they rested upon his handsome hard face with its cold eyes. "Imagine what your father would say if you were to present him with a Catholic daughter-in-law."

"I should love to make the experiment only I don't want to encourage him in his habitual use of bad language," said Esmé. "I can't see, though, that it's any concern of his."

"He will make it his concern. Don't do anything

foolish, my darling boy. We want to see you well and happily married."

"But if you begin to suspect me every time I speak to a girl!" said Esmé, with sudden anger. "I hate being watched and suspected. I have been my own master for years, and now you're trying to keep me from seeing Viola. You made her stay in to read to you—you've sent her off to bed—on purpose to keep her out of my way! And now you go on about a Catholic daughter-in-law. Why, I've known Viola nearly all my life!"

He was indignant with her because in her passionate maternal solicitude she had divined so accurately what was passing in his mind, and he pulled down her little transparent veils and concealments with ruthless hand. "Don't you suppose I can't see that it's because of Viola you're so set on going home to-morrow? And all because she has prevented me from feeling bored to death in Venice!"

The tears gathered in Lady Bethnell's eyes. "You shouldn't speak so cruelly to me, Esmé. I am only thinking of your happiness."

Her appeal seemed to dispel his ill-humor.

"Sorry, Mum. But confess—you've someone up your sleeve, haven't you? Some eminently suitable maiden? Is it that Miss Clethorpe you used to write about? I remember her quite well—a very prim, demure little person who used to be shocked at my rough ways."

"I only wish there was the slightest chance of your winning her! Such a charming, exquisite creature. . . . She has a large fortune of her own besides being Sir Timothy's heir."

Esmé threw back his head and laughed.

"There! Didn't I know? But you shouldn't have shown me the hook and the bait! The hook always frightens me horribly."

His green eyes danced. But his good-humor was now perfectly restored, and they settled down to their game in a spirit of renewed harmony.

CHAPTER VIII

THE May moon shone from a dark blue sky, clear of cloud and delicately spangled with stars. It traced a broad path of light across the lagoon that lay like a field of silver. There was no wind, and the stillness was almost unnatural. The splash of the oar alone made a half-muffled, liquid sound across the silence.

Esmé and Viola sat under the awning. At first they did not speak much, but their thoughts were so deeply concentrated upon each other that it seemed as if some communication must surely pass from mind to mind.

The knowledge that his parents intended to use their influence to bring about a marriage between himself and Isolde Clethorpe had produced the effect that Viola had prognosticated. It had caused him to come to a rapid decision. He was accustomed to procrastinate; he was indolent-minded, slightly vacillating, and he disliked taking decided and irrevocable steps, knowing perhaps how quickly he tired of the thing attained.

Hesitating and capricious, he would probably have left Venice without speaking another word to Viola which should reveal the present state of his mind toward her. But he felt the need of establishing a barrier between himself and those powerful, coöperating elements, his parents, Sir Timothy, and Isolde. What chance could a mere man have against such a combination as that? Besides, his mother's words had taught him that he really loved Viola.

He was not afraid of tiring of her. She was too beautiful for that; and what fears he had, lay only in the possibility of losing her. A secret marriage, to be revealed at a propitious moment—that was what he now contemplated. He wondered if she cared for him enough to consent to such a suggestion.

There had always been something a little elusive about Viola, even when she was a child. There was a point beyond which she would never go, however much he might coax and implore. He could never get her, for instance, to invent a plausible lie that should stave off Miss Malleeson's anger. She had been straight and fearless when confession was forced upon her. That old terror of an aunt! Mercifully she was dead, and there was no one now who counted at all in Viola's life. And she lived with unsympathetic relations—she must long to be free, with the freedom marriage could give.

"Would you ever consent to a secret marriage?" he inquired, suddenly.

"I'm not thinking of getting married, either secretly or not," she replied.

"Don't you understand?" He bent his face a little nearer to her. "I want you to be my wife. I can't leave Venice until you promise that you'll marry me."

"Your mother will never consent. She's suspicious, as it is."

"That is just why I am asking you to marry me secretly."

"I don't think that would be possible for a Catholic," she said, and her voice was cold as ice.

The old story! "Catholics *can't*, you know, Esmé. . . ." He could hear the childish lisping voice uttering those words a decade ago.

"I daresay you couldn't be married like that—as a Catholic. But we could always have a second ceremony."

"I should have to ask a priest about it," said Viola.

Esmé frowned. "I couldn't possibly let you do that. It would give the whole show away. So much depends upon absolute secrecy."

Viola was silent, and he was aware that something within her was sharply warring against his suggestion.

She was conscious of his charm. It was still for her, as it had ever been, irresistible. But she knew now that other things were involved: she had an uprush from that part of her subconsciousness where childish impressions were stored. Miss Malleson was to her still a standard of right and wrong. Behind Miss Malleson's teaching, often so harshly imposed upon her, stood the immense authority, the far-reaching laws of the Catholic Church. They were laws that affected not only your temporal life but your eternal welfare. The contemplation of eternity had always been a terrible thing to Viola. She had been forced to meditate upon it whenever she had been exceptionally naughty. She had never loved the dead woman; she had always feared her; but Miss Malleson stood for something that was permanent and unchanging. She had taught Viola the great truths of her religion. And in her dour harsh way she had loved her little niece.

"It's perfectly easy for you to keep it a secret," continued Esmé's smooth voice. "You've got no relations who matter. This sister-in-law can't possibly count."

"No one counts except myself," said Viola, frostily. "As a Catholic I should have to ask advice."

"Oh, if you mean to let your religion come between us, there's nothing more to be said! You can't care in the least for me," he said, in a deeply injured tone.

"You know that isn't true," she said, rather breathlessly.

"It could all be done so easily," he continued. "When you are back in England you could go away on a visit to friends, and leave sooner than you tell them at your home. I could meet you—we could be married quietly by special license, and go away for our honeymoon. After that, you might have to go back to your brother's house for a little until I could straighten things out at Ardlesham."

"I hate deceiving people. Besides, it's wrong. No, if you really want to marry me, you must tell your mother and have it all quite straightforward. I know I must be married in a Catholic church. I shouldn't be happy if things were done as you suggest." She added this with a curious instinctive foresight.

"I should be happy under any conditions so long as you were my wife, Viola." He took her hand and held it firmly in his own. "You don't know how I love you."

"Then perhaps it is—that I don't love you *enough*," she faltered, "for I simply feel I couldn't play a part and tell all those lies. It would be wrong. If you remember anything about me in the old days, you must remember that I always owned up!"

"Yes, and got whacked for it! I used to think you were a little fool."

She colored. Esmé could still sometimes make her feel ashamed for him.

"You weren't brought up to be afraid of purgatory," she said.

He threw back his head and laughed. "I should think not, indeed!"

"But I was. My aunt was quite logical—she believed it was better for me to suffer in this world when I'd done anything wrong, than in the next."

"A child's sins! Do you really suppose God punishes them?"

She answered gravely: "The child's sins lead to the man's sins, Esmé."

"You're too pretty to preach, darling. Besides, what about coming out with me to-night? Didn't you deceive my mother?"

"Yes. But I wasn't disobeying any law of my Church. That makes a difference. If I consented to a secret marriage in a Protestant church, I should be guilty of sin."

She shrank a little from him. Mingled with her love for him there was a strange admixture of fear. She saw him as ever, conscienceless and careless.

"No rational being believes in purgatory now," he said scornfully. "All that sort of stuff was exploded at the Reformation. And people—really sensible people—are beginning to believe much less in hell."

"Millions and millions of people all over the world believe both in purgatory and hell," she said.

Esmé had an intense dislike to meditating even cursorily upon the subject of a future life, the probabilities of expiation or punishment either temporary or permanent. No doubt such beliefs, in moderation, were useful deterrents to keep women in the straight path and mitigate the natural anxiety of husbands. But they must not be permitted to obtain an exaggerated hold over people. Viola was well worth the winning, he told himself. He had only made the initial mistake of imagining she would be easily persuadable. Miss Malleson's erstwhile pupil certainly did her credit. Emancipated for seven years from that ferocious discipline, she had yet made no attempt to cast off the ancient chains.

"Besides, it isn't only the fear of punishment—" she said.

Yes, there was love too. The love that Viola gave was, as she knew, weak and negligible and inadequate, but it was there. Impossible to contem-

plate the Passion and remain untouched by those poignant Sufferings. Sin regarded in the light of the Redemption assumed a different and very terrible aspect. But she could not explain this to Esmé. He had no grasp of spiritual things. Some day maybe she would teach him, in that strange new intimacy which would perhaps be theirs when they were husband and wife. Her heart softened a little toward him. She saw him ignorant and astray and very lovable. There was something almost maternal in her attitude toward him then.

"I think a religious sense is very valuable and beautiful," he said, presently, after a slight pause, "but we mustn't exaggerate its claims. As men and women of the world, we have constantly to make decisions without any reference to it at all. You're not a child, Viola. And if you refuse to marry me on the conditions I've laid down—and I tell you that they're the only possible ones—I shall never see you again. I shall do my best to forget you. You'll drive me into making a worldly marriage."

I shall never see you again. . . . The words sounded like a knell. She had never contemplated such a disastrous, drastic consequence as that. To go back to South Kensington, to the bleak routine of teaching Cecily's children, with no hope of such an interlude as she was now enjoying, gave her a chill sense of despair. Esmé must have observed something of dismay in her face, for seeing his advantage he drew her closer to him.

"And you're not going to do that, my darling," he said, "you couldn't possibly be so cruel. Why, I thought you loved me. When one loves, nothing else matters."

"Yes—it's quite true I love you," she said, "but—even for you, Esmé—" she hesitated; and then clinging to his hand for comfort, "How can I let you

go?" she cried. The bitter little inward warfare was exhausting her.

"You mustn't let me go," he whispered, and now she felt his lips pressing hers and lingering, too, on her closed eyelids. "You must be my wife. Viola—I can't live without you. And I'm not asking you to do anything wrong. I'm only asking you to do what men and women are doing every day without a thought of evil. It may not be right according to your creed, but you won't be breaking one of the world's laws, and, after all, only the legal aspect matters. We are both free—there's no obstacle to our marriage."

Her face was drawn and almost haggard in the moonlight.

"Then why can't we be married simply and openly like other people?" she said.

"I'd have it that way if it were possible. But you know what my father is. The idea of my being married in a Catholic church would be altogether too much for him without any other obstacles. If I don't do exactly as he wishes, I shall find myself cut off with a shilling."

"I shouldn't mind being poor," she said.

"But I should dislike it very much indeed. I've got quantities of most expensive tastes!"

"Let's go back, Esmé. I can't think about it any more to-night."

"No—we must thrash this out thoroughly first. I must have your promise, my darling child!"

It had never been easy to refuse him. It was less so than ever now, although the forbidden cedar-tree had been exchanged for something of far deeper import. And she loved Esmé. To be his wife seemed to her the most perfect destiny she could imagine, the most wonderful that life could offer. She could see his faults, but they didn't seem to matter.

The man was her whole world, all the same,
With his flowers to praise or his weeds to blame,
And either or both, to love.

"I've a right to this happiness," she said to herself. For her the thought was a daring one; it implied the first dallying with temptation.

They were nearing the Lido now. The strip of land was drawn in shadowy silhouette, pierced faintly with lights. In the distance they could see the lights of Venice, burning in long straight lines, in clustered groups, or scattered as if flung haphazard. The warm wind from the sea touched their faces.

"I wish this could go on forever," said Esmé.

"So do I," said Viola.

It was a beautiful hour, and she wished she could put from her altogether the sordid little scheme he had proposed. Her pride revolted at the thought of that clandestine wedding—just as if he were ashamed of marrying her. She knew that she was worthy to be Esmé's wife, worthy also to be received by his parents with kindly and hospitable welcome. It wasn't as if he would be marrying beneath him. And when all was said and done, she wasn't quite penniless, thanks to Miss Malleeson.

But, then, the other alternative—never to see him again! Never to hear his voice—to feel his kiss. He was passionately dear to her, and the bare threat of separation seemed to deprive her of physical strength.

"Oh, don't ask me to do this, Esmé! I can't . . ."

His hold on her slackened a little, and his face grew hard.

"I've told you what'll happen if you don't promise to be my wife. Do you suppose I'm going to let you play fast and loose with me? And I refuse—I utterly refuse—to estrange myself from my own people."

Yes, she might tear her frocks and break her knees and suffer the consequent penalties, but no blame must be attached to Esmé.

"So don't begin all over again, darling. It only tires one to death!"

"I *am* tired to death," she said.

"Don't you see how useless it is to struggle? We love each other—we wish to marry—don't let's think of side-issues."

"But it isn't as simple as all that."

"We can put everything right afterward."

"But I'd *wait*, Esmé."

"Wait? Women always want to keep a man waiting! But I can't and won't wait, Viola. You're too precious for me to run risks. Besides, in another two months I shall have to go back to India."

She was thinking: "It'll only be for a time. Afterward we can make it all right. God won't punish me for snatching at this happiness—He must know what it means to me. It's mine—it must be mine. I . . . I might convert Esmé." The easy sophistry that accompanies temptation was coloring her thoughts. She "would not play false, and yet would wrongly win."

But, surely, never could temptation come in more seductive guise.

"Well, are you going to promise, Viola?" whispered Esmé.

The plash of the oar, the lisp of parted water, broke the complete stillness. And in that silence Esmé drew her close to him again, and touched her face with his own. He felt that she trembled.

"Yes," said Viola. Her lips closed firmly on the word. She seemed to him then less a young, immature girl than a strong purposeful woman. He had little fear now that she would go back upon her word. She would reconcile it to her conscience somehow. Wonderful how women in love were able

to adjust conflicting opinions! He felt a subtle triumph, as if he had vanquished in a few hours the careful strenuous teaching Miss Malleson had spread over a term of years.

Miss Malleson—yes, he could feel thankful that she was dead, that she no longer wielded authority over this sensitive plant. He could see her now, with her handsome head, her hard shrewd face, the coarse gray hair parted above a corrugated brow, showing the darkish skin beneath; the keen searching eyes that yet somehow possessed a touch of mystical vision; he could see, too, the tall and powerful form, the large, strong, well-shaped hands. He had even been a little afraid of her himself. Once or twice she had spoken to him “for his good,” when she had dismissed Viola to her room, there to await the punishment she considered it her duty to inflict. He had gone out of her presence feeling a little ignoble—an unpleasant sensation. She had had a sharp tongue, that woman, and her eyes had seemed to look right through him as if she could clearly discern the mean, pitiful little soul concealed beneath his handsome heroic exterior.

If she could see him now—luring Viola into a secret marriage wherein no Catholic priest would play any part at all. Protecting himself, too, at every point, counting on the girl’s capacity for silence, her deep loyalty . . .

“And I’ll make you a promise, too, Viola,” he said, with sudden magnanimity. “I’ll promise to tell the old people before my leave’s up. You shall come back with me to India.”

India . . . the word held a certain glamor for her. Life with Esmé promised a rosy, alluring future.

“You’ll be tremendously admired in Simla,” he told her. “There isn’t another woman to touch you there.”

That fresh young beauty, that lovely grace and charm! . . . She must have wonderful frocks and jewels. He wondered if his mother would surrender any of the family diamonds—she never wore them now. Surely, she would give some of them to Viola. And she must love her as a daughter; it ought not to be difficult, as she already loved her as a friend.

The gondola was floating now toward the Grand Canal. There were few lights to be seen in any of the palace windows. It was very late and the world was asleep. They had the feeling that they were alone in this faery world of water and moonlight and cool flowing air . . .

They stopped before the great door. Esmé sprang out on to the wet, slippery steps washed by the water. He gave his hand to Viola, and she stepped out and stood beside him. He fitted the latch-key into the lock and they entered the vestibule, dimly lit. He closed the door.

“Viola, my darling . . . my wife.”

He held out his arms and she crept into them. She did not speak, and he felt that she trembled. Her face was very cold.

CHAPTER IX

FOR the rest of the night Viola lay awake, her brain actively engaged in forming plans for the future. At an early hour she rose, and made her way through a perplexing maze of *calli* and small bridges to a convent situated near the Grand Canal at some little distance from Lady Bethnell's apartment. She had already been there once or twice to visit an English nun who lived there, and to attend Benediction in the chapel in the evening.

She was going there now to make a request.

Feverish and restless during those wakeful hours of the night, she had rehearsed over and over again

that scene with Esmé in the gondola. She saw clearly the impossibility of traveling with him and his mother to England. Lady Bethnell was neither blind nor stupid, and, especially where her son was concerned, she was gifted with quite an alarming faculty of discernment. She would be certain to discover the fact that they were not indifferent to each other. Viola felt, indeed, that she could never hide her own feeling for Esmé. The joy and the malaise of love were upon her. She was sensing its exhausting emotion. When she had risen that morning, she had been horrified at the face that confronted her in the mirror. The pale aspect, the hectic patches in the white, haggard cheeks, the unnatural brilliancy of the eyes, the deep shadows that encircled them, seemed to proclaim that she was passing through a secret, emotional crisis. The task of concealment was, she felt, quite beyond her powers. And the sense of intrigue nauseated her. She was perfectly aware that she had done wrong in promising to marry Esmé on the conditions he had laid down. She tried to blame him for having exacted that promise from her, indicating at the same time an almost insupportable alternative. He should have waited. She was barely eighteen—she would not have minded waiting for several years. His mother would certainly in time have become reconciled to the marriage. She had always liked Viola, in her queer blunt way. And Viola herself was not penniless. She would have nearly three hundred a year when she married or came of age. She had always regarded herself as rather rich than otherwise. So many girls had nothing but a meager allowance, paid irregularly by their parents.

She arrived in time for Mass in the nuns' chapel. When it was over, she asked to see the Reverend Mother on a matter of urgent importance. It would be impossible, the lay-sister informed her, until

breakfast was over; it would be better still, if she could wait until half-past nine. Viola agreed, and went out to get a cup of coffee at a neighboring restaurant. It was only nine o'clock when she returned to the convent, and she still had half an hour to wait. She wandered restlessly about the big parlor with its spotless marble floor, its painted ceilings. Outside, a great cypress tree divided the strip of sky into two narrow oblong portions. Such a blue, blue sky, cloudless and dazzling.

At last the door opened, and a small, slight, black-draped figure came into the room. Viola saw a narrow pale face, made narrower by the snowy coif that framed it. The eyes were gray and very calm and wise.

"You wished to see me, Miss Hudson?" she asked in French.

"Yes," said Viola, "I wanted to ask you if you could let me stay here for a few days—a week. I don't want to travel back with the friend I came out here with. She has her son with her—she doesn't want me. It would be very kind of you to let me come."

"Can you give me a reference? We don't take boarders, you know, but sometimes people come to us to make a retreat."

"I was one of your girls at Polesea," said Viola. "I was at school there. And I'm one of your Children of Mary."

She dragged at a chain that hung round her neck, and pulled out a silver medal that was attached to it.

The nun glanced at it.

"Is it long since you were at Polesea?"

"No—I only left at the beginning of last year. My people are all Protestants, but I was left an orphan and was brought up by an aunt who was a Catholic. After her death I went to school at Pole-

sea and was there for several years." She mentioned the names of some of the nuns in whose classes she had been. The Reverend Mother had been in England and knew several of the nuns she mentioned. She was satisfied that Viola was a suitable inmate for their guest house. There was always a little risk about taking unknown girls imploring shelter for no particular reason.

"We shall be very glad to welcome you as one of our old girls," she said, kindly, "but it must only be for a week or two. And if you wished, one of the nuns could give you a retreat while you are here."

Viola said quickly: "Oh, no, please not. I mean, I'd rather not make a retreat."

She had made retreats while at school, and she remembered the process of soul-searching and self-examination that it necessarily involved. One savored for a time the spiritual life; one went softly; at the end one made resolutions. . . .

To go into retreat now, would almost certainly mean that she would have to sacrifice happiness and Esmé. The thought stabbed her.

"Sometimes when one feels like that about it, it is all the more essential to make one," said the nun.

She had had a very wide experience of souls, especially of the souls of young girls. And in Viola she seemed to discern one that was both restless and suffering. She seemed ill at ease. She was perhaps at the cross-roads.

"I couldn't possibly make one now," Viola declared.

The Reverend Mother said very kindly:

"You shall do just as you wish. When may we expect you?"

"Could I come this afternoon? They go home to-night."

"We shall be quite ready for you."

Viola made a little curtsy and kissed the nun's

hand as she had learned to do at school. She followed her into the hall. A lay-sister opened the door, and in another moment Viola was walking along the narrow, paved *fondamenta*, with the strong May sunshine pouring upon her head. In the narrow canal some boys were bathing. She could hear their cries, their splashing, as they hurled their lithe little brown bodies into the water.

So that was settled. It was a relief to feel that she had this refuge. Lady Bethnell wouldn't have approved of her staying at a hotel or pension by herself, but even she could make no demur about her going to a convent. And Esmé would probably hail it as a clever solution of a difficulty.

As she walked briskly along, her head thrown back a little, Viola was conscious that after the long, slow stagnation of her life with Cecily, things had at last begun to move. She was suddenly plunged into a maze of dramatic events wherein she was one of the principal figures. It even gave her a sensation of pleasure and excitement to be able to say: "My life is in my own hands now." She betrayed a certain recklessness, a revolt against the scruples which the nun's suggestion that she should make a retreat had unconsciously aroused. She had not expected to be met on the very threshold, as it were, with that atmosphere with which Miss Malleson had surrounded her. She had once more found herself in that world where only one thing mattered—to be a good Catholic. She had striven to reach this ideal even as a child. The standard had been there, she had been taught to see its necessity as well as its paramount importance. And even as a child she had been aware of failure. There had been Esmé, for instance, ever cajoling her into paths of disobedience. And there was still Esmé, with his odd power over her, his inability to see that religion either ought to or could play any part in practical life.

As she walked on, her eagerness to go and stay in the convent diminished. She began to realize what would happen. The nuns would come to her room—there was always a nun whose duty it was to look after the guests and see that they had all they wanted, and that they conformed to the few simple rules laid down for them. They would talk to her and lend her books. They would perhaps—as she was one of their old girls—inquire when she had last been to confession. An invincible pressure would be brought to bear upon her. She was sobered at the thought. And if they succeeded, good-bye to Esmé's plan of a secret marriage in a Protestant church. Good-bye to that large free life he had offered her. She would return to Cecily and slavery. She could hear herself saying: "No, Margery, five and four don't make eleven. Lionel, New York is *not* the capital of Canada. . . ."

To go back after this! . . .

The sun was shining brilliantly on the Grand Canal. A crowded steamer went past. She saw a luxurious private gondola, plied by two handsome gondoliers, and beneath the awning she could see two daintily dressed women in white summer frocks and flower-wreathed hats. Suddenly it flashed through her mind that when she was Esmé's wife she, too, would have wealth at her command. Other women would perhaps envy her. Now she was approaching the Rialto, rising in front of her, spanning the Canal with its bold pale curves. She simply couldn't go back to Margery and Lionel after all this loveliness! . . .

Ambitious people—people who were determined to succeed in life—invariably, she had heard it said, concentrated their whole thoughts and aims upon the single object of their desire. They permitted nothing to deflect them from their purpose. It was there,

like some great shining thing to which they moved forward without allowing any obstacles to stand in their way. Perhaps that was why it was sometimes said a good Catholic couldn't be ambitious except in a purely spiritual sense. For so often it was religion, a moral scruple, that put the obstacle there. That was what she felt, and that was what the nuns would assuredly make her feel. The single shining object of their ambitious vision was that eternal after-life to be spent in Heaven. They had entered the cloister to make their path thither more certain. For, *narrow is the gate and strait is the way that leadeth to life . . . and few there are that find it . . .* What dreadful words those were—she wished that she had not thought of them now.

It was nearly luncheon-time when she reached the old palace. Lady Bethnell was full of the fuss of approaching departure. Esmé sat in the big *salone*, smoking lazily. He had resigned himself to the inevitable and now made no further attempt to induce his mother to stay in Venice. He looked up and smiled as Viola appeared, rose slowly and gave her his hand. They had not met since that parting scene in the vestibule last night. But his mother's presence enforced indifference now, and the thought stung Viola.

She went up to Lady Bethnell and kissed her. "Guess where I've been!" she said.

"I am certainly not going to try," said Lady Bethnell, gruffly. She wasn't quite pleased with Viola.

"I've been to the convent and asked the Reverend Mother to let me go there for a week or two. You see, I felt that I simply couldn't face Margery and Lionel quite so soon!"

Lady Bethnell looked both astonished and slightly relieved. She was glad to think that she would be alone with her son on that homeward journey, not

sharing his attentions with Viola. She wasn't sure of Esmé. He was certainly violently interested in the girl, and that cool, disdainful manner of hers piqued him. He was so accustomed to being run after by women. Viola, on the contrary, fled rather than followed, a most dangerous experiment with a spoilt person like Esmé.

"But, my dear—we've got your ticket. And I'm afraid Mrs. Hudson won't at all care about your traveling back alone."

She regarded her dubiously, wondering whether this independent move held perhaps an ulterior significance.

"Cecily won't mind. And I can change the ticket for one of a later date perhaps—they let you do that if you pay something."

"It sounds a perfectly rotten scheme," said Esmé, in his indolent voice. "You'll be bored silly in a convent."

Perhaps he too was thinking of the influence the conventual atmosphere might have upon Viola now.

"And how long do you mean to stay there?" inquired Lady Bethnell.

"Perhaps about a fortnight," said Viola.

"You'll never stick it for a fortnight," said Esmé.

His face wore a discontented look. Of course, it was in a sense a relief that Viola had settled not to travel home with them. He had recognized the difficulty of that. But a convent . . . that was another thing. Viola would be surrounded there by the old influences; and these he knew were in direct opposition to all his own suggestions and schemes. He was fully aware that she had had to overcome certain powerful scruples before she could bring herself to assent to his plan. Her sojourn in the convent would inevitably fortify and accentuate those scruples. It was only, indeed, when he had

told her that unless she consented he would never see her again, that she had finally given in. He had seen her grow pale, and a sudden look of pain had come into her face, as if the cold shadow of separation had already fallen upon her. Then he knew he had triumphed, a little meanly perhaps, for of course it would never have been easy or even possible to go away like that and leave her forever. It was only a threat, but Viola had been brought up on threats, which had invariably materialized if she had not heeded them with sufficient celerity, so that she was little likely to ignore them.

"Well, I'm sure you'll be happy in a convent," said Lady Bethnell, perhaps hoping that Viola would remain there altogether. She would make a charming nun. She could picture her with white coif and dim veil, meek and obedient.

"I suppose they'll let you out when you want to leave?" said Esmé. To him a convent was little better than a prison, and he could not believe that any human being ever voluntarily remained in one.

"Oh, they won't wall me up!" said Viola, with one of her brilliant smiles.

"And of course you're quite sure Mrs. Percival Hudson won't object?" said Lady Bethnell. She did not wish to encounter reproaches for this high-handed, independent action of Viola's.

"It's nothing to do with her. After all, I'm not obliged to live with her."

They sat down to lunch. Viola looked, as indeed she felt, radiant. She was delighted at the success of her plan. She had so disliked the prospect of traveling home with the mother and son, tasting all the bitterness of a false position voluntarily accepted.

Esmé was the least satisfied of the three. Why couldn't she have made up her mind to travel with them? After all, it would have been easy enough

to hoodwink the old lady. They could have snatched a few minutes alone together sometimes. And here, without him, Viola would be exposed to those other claims, those other potent influences, to which she had been, even as a child, such a slave. He wasn't prepared to disregard as negligible the power of the Catholic Church over its devotees. Its laws were all clear, cold, defined and logical. There was no compromise, no mitigation for individuals of its irrefragable laws. Other churches moved—or tried to move—with the times, making things easier and less severe as men and women demanded an increased liberty of action. But not the Catholic Church.

He wasn't only fighting Viola in this fierce struggle to obtain her for his wife; he was fighting something far more powerful. It remained to be seen whether her love for him would triumph or not.

After luncheon they were alone together for a short time, just before Viola's departure for the convent. She could not remain with them until they left—the convent hours were too early. And now it had come to the point, she was anxious to go.

"You must write to me," said Esmé, "not to Ardlesham, of course, but to my club in London. And when you come back you mustn't tell any of your relations. I shall meet you, and take you to some quiet rooms and we shall be married from there." He had been rapidly evolving this plan, and had now brought himself to see that it was far wiser Viola should remain in Venice for the present. "No one but myself will know that you're in England—that'll make everything so much easier for both of us. Of course I hate leaving you here. But as you're bent on it, we must make it a useful move as well."

His voice was cold and authoritative. Inwardly she rebelled against that note of authority.

"I hate all this deceit," she said. "Is it necessary? To me it seems so . . . degrading!"

"It's quite necessary. And I really see nothing degrading in keeping your own counsel. You are not a child."

"Esmé, are you sure it's all right? Do you think you ought to marry me?"

"Don't be absurd," he said, more tenderly, "of course we are going to be married. But I don't want to thrash it out again. You've given me your word, and that's enough."

He drew her to him and kissed her. Under his touch she weakened. It made her realize his love. It would be impossible to let that love go out of her life. Why, it was part of it already—such a splendid royal part! . . .

"Let me go—your mother's coming," she whispered, frantic with fear.

He released her and stood with folded arms by the window. Viola had dropped into a chair, exhausted with emotion. Even the prospect of this short separation was terrible, filling her with sorrow and even anxiety. With his easy susceptibility Esmé might well go away and forget her. The dazzling fortune and beauty of Miss Clethorpe awaited him at Ardlesham. And, loving approval and applause as he did, she felt that the thought of basking for once in the sunshine of parental approbation might have its allure, and tempt him to submit to their wise and prudent choice.

There had been, after all, no sign of Lady Bethnell, and Esmé with renewed daring came across to where she was sitting and bringing a chair close to her sat down and put his arm about her.

"You won't go back on your word, Viola?" he said.

"No."

"You give me your promise?"

"Yes, I promise." She freed herself from his grasp and sprang to her feet. "Esmé—I'm going now. I can't bear any more!"

She looked at him a little wildly.

He kissed her again, trying to soothe her. "It'll be easier than you think, darling. I'll make it easy. You needn't be afraid."

"I'm afraid of so many things . . . of doing wrong—that's the worst fear of all. Oh, you haven't quieted one of my scruples! It's only fair to tell you that. And I'm afraid, too, of your going away—and forgetting—or finding you don't love me. The world seems full of fears and shadows." Her face was ashen pale.

"Dear Viola, you're exaggerating. You must put away these fears—they're childish, you know. It was all very well to have them when you were in the nursery—they may have been necessary for you then. Trust yourself to me . . ." His voice had suddenly grown gentle and full of that irresistible tenderness that always weakened her.

She smiled at him with her lips, but her eyes were filled with tears.

"I believe I'm thinking of the days when you used to get me into such scrapes, always assuring me it was all right," she said.

"Nonsense—we were children. You mustn't think of those days."

"But I do think of them." He would scarcely have been flattered had he guessed how accurately she remembered his talent for wriggling out of the most unpromising situations, his bland facile lying that always shocked her so inexpressibly. She would far rather endure punishment than resort to such mean measures. Esmé had told her frankly she was a fool.

She walked away to the window. The bright glare from the water stung and hurt her eyes. Dur-

ing the little silence that followed, Lady Bethnell came into the room.

"Have you ordered the gondola?" she asked Viola.

"Yes. And I'm quite ready—I must be going."

"I might come—" Esmé began. But Viola cut him short.

"No, please not. I'd rather go alone."

Lady Bethnell looked relieved. "You're quite right, my dear. But it's horrid saying good-by." She kissed her with almost a return of her old affection. Viola was acting wisely and prudently.

When Viola went downstairs Esmé accompanied her. Before he opened the door he kissed her lightly on lips and eyes. Then the grim *portone* was flung open, and the white blinding glare illuminated the dim vestibule.

Outside, the gondola was rocking close to the steps, swishing the water over the narrow *fondamenta*. Viola's luggage was piled upon it in a little heap.

She went down the steps with a face like a stone.

"Oh, you haven't given me your address. And I shall want to write, Viola," said Esmé.

She stretched out her hand and gave him a card. "Here it is."

The gondola gave its long swift movement. She looked up but she could not see Esmé's face for the tears in her eyes.

The sunlight glittering on the broad waters of the Canal was of a brightness that stung. There were little pin-points of white-hot light that pricked her eyes. Impossible, too, to look up at the sky—the glare was torture. On the steps, that tall graceful figure was still standing in a negligent attitude, watching her. She lifted her hand and waved it, and he waved back.

"I wonder if I shall ever see him again," she

thought. It was horrible to confess that dreadful doubt even secretly. But was he the one to fight hard, to exert himself, for something that didn't come readily and easily to his hand?

The swifts skimmed by, like wonderful spirits of the air, tireless in their ceaseless flight. Some early oleanders lifted rose-colored stars above a thicket of gray-green foliage. And the roses, golden and crimson and white, splashed over wall and bridge and balcony in brilliant clusters. There was a scent of flowers in the air, mingling with the sharp brackish breeze from the Adriatic and that hint of the odor of sour mud from the Canal . . .

When she looked back once more, before the gondola turned into a little side *rio*, she saw that Esmé's tall figure had vanished.

CHAPTER X

"**Y**OU are looking pale," said Mother Gabrielle, whose charge it was to look after the guests who stayed in the convent. "I hope you don't feel ill. Many people find the climate of Venice enervating."

"Oh, no, thank you. I'm quite well. I'm hardly ever ill," said Viola, nervously.

The kind grave eyes regarded her with mingled compassion and solicitude. This soul was not at peace; one look at the brilliant restless eyes could tell her that.

Perhaps she had come to the inevitable cross-roads and had a difficult decision to make. Perhaps it was a question of marriage warring against a profound sense of vocation. This was not an unusual dilemma with Catholic girls. Sometimes worldly parents would endeavor to force a girl con-

scious of a true vocation into a brilliant marriage. Or perhaps this Miss Hudson had had the anguish of finding herself in a situation where her religion and her will were in direct opposition to each other. There was often in such cases a kind of conflict between worldly and spiritual interests. And if the heart were involved the conflict sometimes proved a fiery one. Some women took refuge in a convent at such a time in order to surround themselves with spiritual thoughts, and fortify themselves against the very thing they secretly longed for.

"Come up and see your room," the nun said, gently.

She led the way upstairs. In a corridor apart from the rest were rows of doors each labeled with the name of some saint. These were the rooms set apart for guests and retreatants. Mother Gabrielle paused before a door marked "S. Lorenzo," and opened it. The room within was furnished almost as simply as a nun's cell. There was a little white bed, above which hung curtains of mosquito-netting suspended from the ceiling. A chest of drawers with a small mirror above it, a table, a couple of cane chairs and a wash-stand, comprised the rest of the furniture. The window was open, and beyond it Viola could see great trees lifting their leaves to the sunshine.

"How quiet—how peaceful! I shall like being here," she said, simply.

Close to the bed on the white-washed wall there hung a Crucifix and a holy-water stoup.

"I am glad you like it. Often it does one good to spend a few days quietly in a convent to pray—to meditate."

"I'm sure it does."

"Mass is at seven. And to-night we have Benediction, at six o'clock. It's the first Friday of the month."

The first Friday of the month—yes, it was the first of June, the month specially set apart for the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Our Lord. Viola had not remembered it, but the nun's words took her back to her convent school-days. She had always made her Communion on that day, going to confession the evening before. Some of the older girls had belonged to the Apostleship of Prayer, whose members were pledged to honor this great and mystical devotion. Viola felt as if a chord had been touched in her heart, and that its vibrations were causing her a subtle torture.

"I ought never to have come here," she thought.

"Supper is at seven. You will find two other ladies there. Would you like to be called in the morning?"

"No . . . yes . . . I mean—please," stammered Viola.

Mother Gabrielle went quietly out of the room. When she had gone Viola sat down by the open window, and her eyes filled with tears. She hadn't expected to suffer like this. The memories of other days held her fast, hurting her. She could remember the good resolutions she had been wont to make at school. Never deliberately to offend by word or deed. To die rather than to offer the rebellion and outrage of deliberate sin to the Divine Majesty of Christ. And now she was coldly planning this defiance of the Church's laws.

Sin . . . The word scourged her and brought a little flame of guilt to her cheek. Already she perceived the futility of Esmé's glib sophistries. But he wasn't a Catholic. He had no idea how one was held and bound. He was asking her to outrage the sanctity of marriage. She was perfectly aware that she could not marry a Protestant without first obtaining a dispensation. And she could not obtain this unless Esmé made certain promises.

Nevertheless, she had promised to marry him secretly in a Protestant church, without any such dispensation, without binding him to those necessary conditions.

The crowning folly was to come here—to place herself again under those ancient spiritual influences. It meant that she would only prolong the conflict and make it far more bitter and difficult. She must choose between Esmé and her religion—that was what it came to. And here she could only contemplate one side of the picture.

And then she thought of Esmé. She saw him standing on the steps, watching her with lazy admiration in his green eyes as she descended into the gondola. His little smile of triumph . . . She loved him, but she had no illusions about him. He was just what he had always been, egoistic, elusive, deceitful and unscrupulous. These were hard words but his charm could override all these less agreeable characteristics. And with all his defects she loved him.

When she thought of him, she could almost feel him physically near, and she felt that her love for him was an all-conquering emotion that was capable of sweeping aside every barrier.

When Viola returned to her room that evening, after a very simple supper that contrasted vividly with the elaborate menus that had prevailed at Lady Bethnell's, she found a little heap of books on the chest-of-drawers. Some were in English, some in French, and all were of a religious kind. There were Lives of the Saints, Meditations, and biographies of eminent Catholics. She had no books with her, and she was badly in need of something to read. She turned over the pages of one or two of them carelessly. They were all chosen with a view of stimulating devotion, and she felt that they would deepen the convent atmosphere. Although she was

not in retreat, her soul was to be nourished. There were little rules to be obeyed. She was not left isolated and alone as she would have been if she had gone to a hotel or pension.

She stood by the window and looked out upon the quiet little garden. A great cypress-tree stood there, velvet-black in the moonlight. A bat passed, a filmy fluttering thing like a noiseless shadow. There was no splash of lapping water, no echo of the Venetian sounds and cries. It was a hushed little world, quite apart from the busy life of the sea-city.

Esmé must be in the train now. She could picture him, sitting opposite to his mother in the compartment, his hat pulled down over his eyes. Yes, even this short parting was terrible. Everything about the future was cruelly uncertain. And she loved him, she needed him with all the human part of her. God couldn't punish her for marrying him when she loved him so much. In a few weeks perhaps they would be husband and wife.

The bell of a neighboring church rang out sharply. She looked at her watch. Nine o'clock—that was the *De Profundis* bell that nightly reminds Catholics to pray for their dead. Viola rose and tried to repeat the words of the psalm. But the effort was too much for her. She broke down and sobbed helplessly.

The days passed monotonously. Sometimes Viola was seized with a fever of restlessness and anxiety that seemed to sap her very life. At such moments she could hardly bear the restriction imposed by those cloistered convent walls. But she forced herself to remain there. She would not even go out for a walk, feeling that she would never be able to persuade herself to return.

Each day was just like the one that went before in outward happenings. She was called soon after

six, and she rose at once, almost glad to be up, despite the curious weariness and lassitude of her body, after the miserable wakeful night punctured with brief intervals of sleep tortured by dreams of Esmé. She dressed herself very simply in a plain dark blue serge dress, and with a black lace veil over her head went down to the chapel. The nuns were already assembled there; as well as the girls, of whom there were perhaps fifty, all dressed alike in dark blue with black veils. When she was at school Viola had been dressed exactly as these girls were dressed; she could picture herself coming in, genuflecting, walking with slow rhythmic step to her appointed place. Miss Malleson had always dressed her so austere that she had never rebelled against the convent garb as so many of the girls did, grumbling at its simplicity. Miss Malleson had always regarded Viola's ever-increasing beauty with dismay; to her it was a danger and a temptation, and she crushed every symptom even of wholesome vanity in the child. Viola had worn her hair combed back from her forehead and fastened in a tight plait. Her dresses were plain and always a little old-fashioned, and she seldom had a new one unless it was absolutely necessary. Her frocks were lengthened and turned until she was secretly ashamed of their shabbiness. Her shoes were stout and ugly, and the coarse woollen stockings hurt her feet. But the training had stood her in good stead, for even now she was little dependent upon exterior comfort. She could bear both cold and heat, and she cared little what she ate. Miss Malleson had fostered a stoical fortitude where the pains of the body were concerned. Luckily the child was strong and had had a good constitution or the cold baths, the absence of adequate heating, might have rendered her permanently delicate.

Yes, she could picture Viola Hudson among these

girls. At school her conduct had been almost perfect, but she had made few friends. She had left school indeed without forming a single intimate friendship. Although Miss Malleson was then dead, Viola lived still according to the rules she had laid down for her guidance. At the convent she never displayed those sudden fits of anger which Mrs. George Hudson had sometimes witnessed. Her behavior had been indeed so exemplary that many of her companions confidently prophesied she would become a nun.

It was only during the first few days that she felt any rebellion against the atmosphere of the convent, the gentle spiritual teaching of Mother Gabrielle. Gradually the environment achieved its work. She sank tranquillized under it, no longer rebelling against its consummate quietude. She was even thankful for its strange harmonious peace, the subtle reflection perhaps of the secret processes of sanctification operating upon those cloistered souls within its walls.

And as the convent atmosphere began to prevail, the days spent with Esmé seemed to lose something of their violent coloring. They had stood out in her imagination bathed in fiery hues of crimson, and burning blue, and gold. Nights of liquid moonlight; the rush of sea-wind in the darkness, coming like an icy caress; the lap of water. The beautiful pearl-colored lagoon, stretching out like a pale lake. The reflections of the lights of Venice illuminating the black water, shining in serried lines like golden luminous flowers. Velvet dark skies scattered with stars. And Esmé near her, forming part of the landscape, his presence intensifying its very beauty, adding too to its unreality, its faery quality. To be near Esmé, listening to his voice, so soft that it never jarred even when he broke the most perfect silence. The touch of his hard thin hands. Only to look

at his hands you realized their power, and how deft and purposeful they were. The glint of gold in his hair. Those queer green eyes of his, the color of breaking waves, just beneath the foam. It was strange to think that these things could so quickly recede even a little into the background, losing something of their power over her. For never had she experienced such violence of emotion as in those few days spent with Esmé in Venice. Physically and mentally she was exhausted, and thankful to savor the contrast of this quiet but occupied peace. For it wasn't indolent or lethargic, this convent life, as so many supposed. There was busy constant movement within its walls. Appointed tasks of definite scope and intention. It was no slight thing to train half a hundred girls to carry on in their future lives the torch of their faith, and all that it meant to the Catholic home. There was no blind groping. Everything was punctual, regular, and ordered. Very, very hard in itself, this religious life, shorn of all physical comfort and repose, but made easy because of that divine gift of "vocation," one of the most powerful, the most compelling that can turn the human soul into paths of sanctity and sacrifice.

Viola barely touched the fringe of that life, except at Mass and Benediction, which she attended regularly. But she was conscious of it all around her and of its steady effect upon her. After a week her whole being was lulled. She had ceased to watch feverishly for letters. This life seemed to separate her from Esmé without inflicting any of the sharp pain of parting. He didn't belong . . . the very thought of him was an incongruity. Sometimes his face would rise up before her, smiling, sardonic, with all the usual phrases about nuns and convents on his lips. And then she knew that in the deep places of the soul her soul could never meet Esmé's. But he filled her heart.

After ten days the letter came; it was as satisfying or as unsatisfying as such things generally are, and ran as follows:—

Darling, I waited to write because I couldn't say what I wanted to—namely, that you must come back to London at once to be in readiness for our marriage at the earliest possible moment. But you will have pictured to yourself what it means, this return of an only son to his horrible ancestral home after two years' absence. Even the prodigal was never feasted as I have been, to the detriment of my nerves and digestion. The dinners and lunches, the cricket-matches, the perpetual entertaining, a week-end spent at Sir Timothy Clethorpe's under precisely the same conditions as prevail here, only exaggerated, and far more highly colored. Different faces round you, a little more to eat, a more strenuous luxury, a more complicated round of pleasure. The damsel is really charming, and for an heiress is remarkably pretty. She is as dark as you and even taller, but her eyes are blue, and I like your darling brown ones best. I have never met anyone so well-educated and expensive; her year in Paris was not wasted. I wish I had never seen you, for I am sure I should have fallen sufficiently in love with her to invite her to share my somewhat dubious prospects and brand-new title if I had not landed at Venice last month. You are a witch, my precious one. The fair Isolde is of the sweet type, she never says anything witty or ironic or unexpected. She ought to be a diplomat's wife—she would play the part of ambassadress very prettily in a few years' time. It is touching to see my father so charming to her. I think she has cast spells over him. Sir Timothy is always devising sports for his pretty niece. Balls, tennis, dinners . . . I am a standing dish at them all. Alas, I am the horse conducted with such kindness and consideration and forethought and firmness withal, to the water, who yet most churlishly refuseth to drink! Because the poor devil has drunk of the water of life—which is love—he turns from all less divine draughts. Venice and Viola, and the moonlight on the lagoon! "The time

and the place and the loved one all together," a combination which Browning said never happened. I feel I could give Browning points! . . .

Can you stay in durance vile a little longer? My father is not well, he is in bed with a touch of bronchitis; he is in a curiously paternal mood, so you may guess what a good boy I have been since my return. He will hardly have me out of his sight. To go up to London and search for rooms and make plans for your coming, is out of the question. I must be at hand, a patient and devoted son. My hours of relaxation must be spent under Sir Timothy's roof. But I am playing the part with quite enormous success. I have never so basked in the sunshine of parental approbation. Even my mother's suspicions (they *were* aroused, you know) are quieted. But she seldom speaks of you. She had your pretty note of thanks and seemed pleased with it. She said, "Viola is a dear girl, and I think I shall have her to stay with me next winter and marry her to Vincent Astbury." My darling, he is the only R. C. within a radius of twenty miles; he has his own chapel, is something of a recluse, and looks quite different from any man of his age I've ever seen. He must be thirtyish now. He doesn't hunt, shoot, play cricket or tennis, but I believe he writes a little, and plays the violin in the bosom of his family, which consists of an elderly mother, devoted to good works, and two plain elderly sisters who call him "Vinnny" and adore him. Such an environment cannot be good for any man, and I chuckle when I think of my own pretty Papist in that gallery. It would be almost like a return to Miss Malleson's rule, minus of course the corporal punishment! Fastings and confessions and austere Lents—you'd have them all. But I mustn't even in fun satirize these things which have all helped to make you what you are, the most delicious, lovely, bewildering creature in the world. A plague on all the Isolde Clethorpes! Did you know her name was Isclde? It is quite pretty and suits her. I think all the good fairies must have mustered at her christening, and perhaps they were a little bit afraid of Sir Timothy and so were unusually assiduous in their well-wishing. . . .

Are you happy in Venice, my own one? Do you pray for me a great deal? I like to think that you do. I am a miserable sinner, but I love you.

ESME CRAYE.

At first the letter pleased her, but on a second reading at night just before she retired to bed it flung her into a strange agitation that produced a return of the old sleeplessness. She perceived so clearly the beginnings of an interest in Isolde Clethorpe. And for the first time in her life Viola knew what it was to be jealous; she felt the cold claws clutching at her heart so that it seemed to "wither away for fear." Her peace was for the moment completely destroyed. How could she have spent these days in such tranquil acceptance of separation? She had not only acquiesced in it but she had even found a strange refreshment in that solitude. She had been without misgivings or fears. She had not even allowed her thoughts to dwell too concentratedly upon Esmé; it sufficed her to know that he was in England, that he loved her, that he was hers. The separation was to be as brief as he could make it. She had sometimes even dreaded his summons for her to go back to England. It would mean the end of her girlhood, a closing down of the chapter, the beginning of a new life. And now she saw without possibility of mistake that Esmé had plunged gayly into new interests, even into a fresh flirtation—yes, the hard word would come. He had not attempted to hide from her the fact that Miss Clethorpe possessed "all the gifts from all the heights." Subtle pressure was no doubt being brought to bear by the elders on both sides. The trap was overflung with flowers, so that all its grim iron teeth were hidden. Esmé . . . and Miss Clethorpe. Isolde . . . a pretty name . . . it suited her . . .

Viola's eyes were hot and dry and tearless. She was too angry to cry. But the strange fierce indignation was mingled with something that seemed like the breaking of her heart with grief. Grief at the loss of Esmé—and of something in him that had seemed so perfect. It was degrading to think that he could go straight from her kisses to another girl more beautiful and wealthy and far more suitable as a wife for him than she could ever be.

Early on the following morning she wrote her answer to the letter. It ran as follows:

DEAR ESME:

Your letter came yesterday. I am so glad you are happy at home and that your father is so friendly toward you. I am sure you must wish to study his desires in every way, and as you already admire Miss Clethorpe so much, I strongly advise you to marry her. You will please so many people by doing so—your parents, Sir Timothy, Miss Clethorpe herself, and surely you will share too in the general happiness. I feel you will only be relieved at my giving you back your freedom in this way. I've only had such a little bit of it, haven't I? Even Miss Clethorpe can't grudge me such a tiny scrap of your affection and approval. I feel like a wise elderly relation giving you good advice. You will remember my old inability to cry out when I was hurt? Well, I'm not going to cry now. Not a single tear. Although to you I needn't even pretend that I'm not hurt. Last night I even thought it might kill me to lose you, but this morning I'm quite hard and brave and sensible. When I promised to marry you I was, as you knew, faithless to other things, and so I thoroughly deserved to be punished. And I am being punished.

I'm sure you'll make Miss Clethorpe very happy. You needn't tell her about me unless you like. Tell her after you are married. She won't mind so much then.

Your affectionate old friend,
VIOLA.

She dropped a great tear on the blotting paper. But the letter itself was unsmudged, and from the first word to the last the handwriting was admirably firm and clear. She read it through once, and then folded it and put it into the envelope, addressed to Esmé's club in London. She had the feeling that she had dug her own grave. But hadn't his letter, all the way through, been an unformulated appeal for freedom? To be released from chains that irked? Venice and its glamor had faded into the distance, and with it Viola's figure. He had only loved her for a few days. The passion was not permanent. And she might have known that he would be cowardly when it came to the point. He had always been cowardly in a moral sense, afraid to face the consequences of his own actions, taking refuge in the meanness of lying. And there was Miss Clethorpe, perhaps aware in a cool detached way that she was expected to make this brilliant marriage with Lord Bethnell's only son. Not caring . . . oh, never caring as she, Viola, had done! . . .

And then she laughed at this absurd reflection. For of course every woman to whom Esmé showed the slightest attention must inevitably fall a little in love with him. It was possible that Isolde Clethorpe (yes, it *was* a pretty name,) might love him as Viola herself loved him, with a fierce love that cried out for its due return.

There would be time to post the letter before the twelve o'clock breakfast. Viola put on a shady hat and went out. At that hour the *fondamenta* was almost deserted, and there was no sign even of the little brown bathers. She went down to the landing-stage and took the first steamer that stopped there.

The air from the canal blew freshly and restored her. She had acted on impulse, but something

assured her that the impulse was due in some measure to the convent atmosphere. All these days she had been impregnated with it; had experienced its resistless pressure upon her. Esmé had only made her task a little easier by showing her his own unmistakable desire for freedom. And she had always doubted him. It had not even deceived her when he wrote that he had known "the time and the place and the loved one all together." He had only succumbed to the rather insistent glamor of Venice with its eternal appeal to lovers, and she had happened to be pretty and charming enough to satisfy his fastidious taste. He had quite believed himself to be in love, and he had persuaded her to share in the belief.

That was all, she thought, as she walked across the sunny square of St. Mark's, where the vain and greedy pigeons were disporting and preening themselves in the brilliant June sunshine. Some tourists were sitting there feeding the birds which clustered about them, perching on their shoulders and hands, and devouring the seeds flung to them, as if they had been famished.

She went across to the post-office and dropped her letter into the box. The little sound it made in falling had a touch of finality about it, like earth being sprinkled upon a coffin. So that was finished, and she was glad she had had the courage to write it. Yes, glad . . . what a funny word to use in connection with this hideous pain that was tearing at her heart! . . . But she wasn't going to cry out. She hadn't been Miss Malleson's ward all those years for nothing.

It was a relief to feel that the letter was safely posted. It was beyond her power to retrieve it now. There were hours, weeks, years of suffering lying in front of her, but in that first moment she savored a kind of harsh contentment.

As yet no contrition for that meditated rebellion had entered her heart. She was concerned only with her grief at losing Esmé. She had acted deliberately and the venture hadn't come off. If she had not received his letter and had been urged by the influence of the convent to renounce this marriage, she would have felt the blessed anguish of contrition, that heals even while it wounds. But she had not acted from any spiritual motive. She had broken off her engagement because Esmé had so obviously wished her to do so; and she had been faced, too, by the degrading conviction that if she didn't give him back his freedom, he would have found some way of wriggling out of the chains himself. Her face flamed at the thought. To be flung aside like a worn-out toy. To be supplanted by Miss Clethorpe . . .

She hurried on to a little landing-stage near a big hotel. Soon she had boarded a steamer to take her back to the convent. Beautiful palaces rose on either side of the Grand Canal, making that broad stream the most sumptuous quarter in the world. Gondolas rocked idly, fastened to the great gayly-painted posts that rose out of the water. Life must indeed be pleasant, spent in one of those splendid, decorative, spacious abodes. Now she was passing the palace where Lady Bethnell's former apartment was situated. The brown awnings hung down over the carved stone loggia. Viola thought then with a shudder of Percival's smug, well-appointed house. She remembered the dark and thick fog that had prevailed on the day when Lady Bethnell came to see her.

Some day she would have to go back there. It would be very soon now—she was coming to the end of her money. It was the only home she had. She wasn't clever enough to earn her own living. No one would take a governess who was both pretty

and young. The unshed tears seared her eyelids.

Oh, it had always been there—even in her happiest hours with Esmé—this little dread that he might prove faithless. And always, too, there had been Something behind it all that would not permit her conscience to enjoy a moment's ease. Was it that she wasn't to be allowed to break the laws of that great Power to whose service she had been dedicated from childhood? She had too much sense of religion not to have considered this point of view with a certain terror. People were saved from committing a sin sometimes in spite of themselves. What seemed like the cruelty of frustration was really a mercy. But she had at worst meditated only a temporary rebellion against the laws of her Church. She hadn't meant to cut herself adrift always. She had intended only one false step, to be retrieved as soon as possible. And now she felt as if she had been pulled up sharply as with a curb on the very brink of the precipice.

Perhaps in Heaven Miss Malleeson was praying for her, just as the nuns in the convent must have been praying for her, aware that hers was a soul in distress and difficulty.

Viola went back to the convent curiously quieted, her brain and heart frozen into a kind of numbness. There were drugs that rendered your body insensible to pain or any feeling even while they did not deprive you in the least degree of consciousness. She felt as if some such drug had been poured into her heart.

CHAPTER XI

A WEEK passed. During that week Viola did not again leave the convent. She was half afraid that even such a slight contact as that with the outside world might diminish her new-

found peace. She was like one recovering from an operation, suffering sharply and continuously, and yet blissful in the knowledge that the horror was overpassed. She did not wish to endanger that recovered peace of mind, of conscience, of soul . . .

One morning Mother Gabrielle came into her room and said:

"My dear, an English priest is coming this morning to hear confessions. You know we have two English nuns here, besides three of the children who can as yet speak no other language. I thought perhaps you might like to take the opportunity. . . ."

She paused, fixing her kind and wise eyes upon Viola.

"Oh, no, no . . . I think I'd rather not—at least to-day. I'm not feeling prepared—you see, it's some little time. Perhaps when he comes again." She uttered the excuses lamely, hesitatingly.

"Just as you like, my dear. But don't put it off too long. We are too apt to say 'another time' without thinking of what Almighty God intends for us. And if we have done anything to offend, there is all the more reason why we shouldn't delay. We must make haste to seek His pardon—to win His friendship once more. The soul needs her medicine—her nourishment—just as much as the body."

"Yes, Mother," said Viola, humbly, with downcast eyes. "I know that, but I feel I can't to-day."

She followed the nun to the door. "Pray for me," she said, and now her voice trembled a little.

"We are all praying for you, my dear child," said Mother Gabrielle, in her kind matter-of-fact voice.

She went away, leaving Viola trembling and excited, on the verge of tears.

She sat down by the open window, for here on the north side of the house the sunshine did not intrude, and looked out upon the garden, at the plot

of turf growing a little brown, with its fountain in the middle. Beyond, gleaming in a grove of ilex-trees, there was a white statue of the Madonna. Viola's eyes rested on the fresh verdure, the clustered decorative roses that blossomed so prodigally, the white and rose-colored oleanders that were breaking into bloom, fragile as flames. Overhead the sky was of a deep sapphire blue, serene and cloudless.

As she sat there, she heard a knock at the door and a lay-sister came into the room, carrying a telegram. Viola hastily scrawled her signature on the receipt offered to her, and then waited till she was alone before she opened the envelope. The message ran as follows:

"Your sweet absurd letter received. Return immediately. All arrangements made wire time arrival.
ESME.

She sank into a chair. Her limbs trembled so violently that for a moment she almost feared that she was going to faint. The whole world seemed buzzing and whirling above her in dizzy gyrations of hot white light. She felt the clamor of wheels in her head.

Little by little calm came back to her. She hadn't lost Esmé. He still loved her. He refused to accept his dismissal. He didn't love Isolde Clethorpe. He loved her, and he wanted her to go back to England and marry him as soon as possible. Yes, she was going to be his wife. She mustn't think of anything else now. She had been prepared—hadn't she given proof of it?—to make a sacrifice, but now it was no longer necessary. Not necessary? Across the silence she seemed to hear Mother Gabrielle's controlled emotionless voice saying: "We are too apt to say 'another time,'

without thinking of what Almighty God intends for us." Viola turned a little pale. She was aware, as never before, of her own dreadful and deadly possession of free-will—that inalienable gift that bestows upon each one the final choice between good and evil. In the end you were left to decide for yourself, so her thoughts ran. You had help—every help. You were given the strength necessary to resist temptation. You could fling yourself on your knees and pray to Almighty God to be saved from the sin, so deadly in its insidious attraction, for which you were prepared to barter for your immortal soul. But always the ultimate decision rested with yourself. You were perfectly free to obey or to rebel, to serve or to refuse submission.

"*An English priest is coming this morning to hear confessions. . . .*" It was simply horrible to be tortured like this. She felt as if her heart were being torn in two. Why had the telegram arrived almost immediately after Mother Gabrielle's brief visit? Viola was reminded of the meditation entitled the *Two Standards*—perhaps the most powerful of all the Exercises of St. Ignatius. At school it had never failed to make the most profound impression on her, so that for days afterward she had gone softly, as one in fear . . .

"*I thought perhaps you might like to take the opportunity. . . .*"

The sentences dropping one by one from those calm lips haunted her. They echoed pitilessly in her brain. Conscience caught up the cry and told her: "Yes, she was right—you ought to go to confession. Yes, this morning. You ought to tell the priest everything. You ought to ask his advice. And he would tell you that you can't possibly marry Esmé without obtaining the necessary dispensations. . . ."

She looked again at the telegram. "Your sweet

absurd letter—" it was so like Esmé to waste his money on those two unnecessary adjectives. A mental picture of him rose up before her mind. She saw him standing on the wet steps outside the palace, the water of the Canal washing at his feet. She could see his tall graceful form clad in its gray flannel suit; the brushed sleek head of thick crinkly fair hair; the green eyes clear as water. He was smiling at her. . . .

She had been wrong then not to trust him. He had meant what he said—every word of it. He intended to marry her. He did love her, and was prepared even to face a measure of poverty for her sake. He was calling to her now across the sea. His voice echoed in her ears, drowning the calm speech of Mother Gabrielle.

"I must go to him," said Viola.

She went to the chest of drawers and began to take out her possessions, as if in preparation for packing her trunk. But wouldn't it look rather queer to go away to-day? The nuns would conclude that the telegram contained bad news, summoning her home. And she would have to pretend that all was well. She would have at least to fib a little. The first perhaps of a long, long line of lies, smudging her soul.

She put the things back into the drawer. She couldn't decide so quickly as all that. She would wait a day or two. She could make some excuse to Esmé afterward. But she couldn't start to-day. She wondered irrelevantly if the English priest had arrived, if he was sitting now in his confessional in the chapel, with his little row of penitents awaiting their turn to go up and kneel at the grating and make their confession and receive absolution. She pictured herself going down, entering the chapel with a black veil on her head, taking her place at the end of the bench, awaiting her turn.

Again there was a knock at the door. Oh, why couldn't they leave her alone this morning? There was almost a fretful sound in her voice as she cried, *Avanti!* Looking up, she saw that it was Mother Gabrielle who had returned.

"I just came to tell you that the English priest is in the chapel now—hearing confessions. I thought you might have changed your mind."

"No, I haven't changed," said Viola, almost sullenly. She felt indignant with Mother Gabrielle for her insistence. It was as if the nun had become aware of that dreadful interior conflict that was shaking her very life to its foundations.

"You have had a telegram?" said Mother Gabrielle, approaching the window. "I hope you haven't received bad news?"

"No—nothing bad. It may mean, though, that I shall have to go home a little sooner than I expected," stammered Viola.

"We always like to go to confession before a long journey," said Mother Gabrielle, gently. "It's as well to be in a state of grace—"

And she looked almost pleadingly at Viola.

"Not to-day. I'm really not prepared—" The girl's voice betrayed annoyance.

Mother Gabrielle went out of the room.

Perhaps the nuns guessed that something was wrong. Viola had been assiduous in going to Mass and Benediction, but she had never once made her confession or received Holy Communion. All her outward calm didn't deceive them. They knew perhaps that hers was a soul astray, tortured, restless, the prey of conflicting forces.

"I must go away—I can't bear it," she said, aloud.

She sat there with hands clenched, fighting against that fierce, growing desire to go down to the chapel and make her confession and receive absolution. The impulse was as imperative as any she had ever

known. The desire was a kind of gnawing spiritual hunger. All her past training, the teaching and molding of so many years, was in league with it, supporting it, strengthening it. She could hear the words of absolution—those divinely healing words. Oh, she had known the comfort of them, even after the nursery sins of childhood. The words *in a state of grace* echoed in her ears. The promise of pardon for all that deliberately meditated rebellion, seemed like some fair fruit, high up, almost out of reach, yet just, just within her power to obtain if she strove loftily. But on the other side stood Esmé, with smiling face, pulling her back to earth, the good comfortable earth. She hid her face in her hands. The clamor of conflict was exhausting her.

She felt, too, as if Miss Malleeson's stern eyes were watching her to see whether duty or inclination would prevail.

"We always like to go to confession before a long journey . . ."

She shivered. But there would be time to make amends. Even the Prodigal Son was given opportunities for remorse and contrition. He wasn't allowed to die of hunger among the husks. And perhaps when she went back to England she would be able to persuade Esmé to have the marriage in a Catholic church. At least there was no sin in going back to England, in seeing him again. Even if in the end she found it necessary to break off the engagement. . . .

She knew that she was deceiving herself with these thoughts. What she ought to do was to go to confession now, to ask advice, and then perhaps entreat Mother Gabrielle to allow her to remain hidden in the convent, secure against the temptation that would assail her afresh if she went home. They would never refuse their consent if she gave such a reason; on the contrary, they would urge her to

remain. But to fail Esmé now, would be to lose him forever. She knew him well enough to feel certain of that. If he could not marry her, he would set himself seriously to the task of loving and winning Miss Clethorpe. His letter had shown her that he would not find it a matter of much difficulty. Already he was attracted by her, by her beauty, her charm, enhanced perhaps by an expensive education, a wide culture. He would be happy, for he loved an atmosphere of approbation and admiration. He would enjoy permanently his father's favor. The sharp jealousy she had known when she first read his letter was clawing again at her heart, tearing it. She couldn't give him up. She loved him. She wanted to be his wife, to spend her life at his side.

She went back to the chest of drawers and methodically emptied it of its contents, laying her possessions in neat rows on the bed. Soon it would be time for lunch, and after that meal she would go out and buy her ticket and send a telegram to Esmé telling him when to expect her. She wasn't going to let herself be nervous or frightened; she wasn't a weak person who hesitated and feared and couldn't make up her mind.

Her face was very hard and set, as she dragged her trunk from beneath the bed and began to pack. The little activity soothed her. She had been idle the whole morning—no wonder her nerves were shaken.

Once she glanced at the clock. The priest would have finished hearing confessions by this time. Probably he had gone home.

We are too apt to say "another time" without thinking of what Almighty God intends for us. . . .

The words haunted her uncomfortably. It consoled her, however, to remember that Esmé would

have laughed at her fears. His easy incredulity would perhaps even have chased them away—for the time being.

CHAPTER XII

THE boat train from Dover rushed into the London terminus toward the close of a lovely afternoon in late June. Viola stood near the corridor window, her eyes strained to catch sight of Esmé on the platform. There were a great many people, and in the bustle and confusion of arrival she did not at first discern that tall figure. Supposing he hadn't come, after all? But such a thing was unthinkable, since the success of their whole plan depended upon his meeting her, and escorting her to the lodgings he had found for her.

"It's rather like Richard Feverel—" she thought.

Only, that Richard had been full of ardor and eagerness to find Lucy; he had had no Isolde Clethorpe to distract him just before his marriage.

When Viola searched her heart in self-examination, she was uncomfortably aware that her jealousy of Miss Clethorpe had been one of the principal reasons for her ready acquiescence in Esmé's plan. If it hadn't been for this other girl, so perfect, so wonderful, she would have hesitated and temporized, yielding only when no other solution was possible.

No one knew that she was leaving Venice except Esmé. Percival and Cecily believed her to be settled at the convent for some time to come, and probably felt it was quite natural she should wish to be there. Perhaps they hoped she would develop a vocation, and become a nun. They must have felt that she wouldn't long be content with the kind of life they were able to offer her, acting as governess

to their two dull children. Viola was aware that she was something of a problem to them, and she had always felt that her sister-in-law disliked her. They would of course be delighted if she married Esmé—they would think her a fool to permit any religious scruples to deter her from making such a brilliant match as that.

As she descended from the train, she pulled down her rather thick black veil so that it entirely hid her features. She was suddenly alarmed lest she should meet someone she knew—someone who might mention to Cecily that they had seen her.

Presently she saw Esmé sauntering down the platform toward her. He had not as yet perceived her, so that she had the advantage of him. She watched him attentively, noted his easy nonchalant grace of bearing, the lissom, supple, upright figure, hard and thin. He had the unconscious arrogance of the man whose place in the world is both important and assured.

He quickened his footsteps. She knew he had seen her. Her heart beat more quickly. He came up and took her hand.

“Darling,” he murmured.

It was some time before her luggage was cleared. Her modest trunk was then hoisted upon a four-wheeler, which formed the usual conveyance in those days of the early 'nineties when there was luggage to be transported. Within, there was a musty odor as of damp velvet mingled with straw. The seats were hard, the windows rattled abominably, the jolting was unbroken by anything so civilized as rubber tires upon the wheels. But Viola did not heed these minor discomforts, indeed she probably did not notice them at all. She was sitting beside Esmé, and his hand held hers with a firm tight grasp.

“Keep your veil down,” he said, authoritatively,

when he discerned a slight gesture on her part as if she intended to lift it. "You mustn't be seen, you know."

He thought he had never realized before how conspicuous she was in her loveliness, her air of the pretty admired woman, her increased assurance, which no doubt the fact of their betrothal had bestowed upon her.

"You are so dazzling to-day," he added, in a light bantering tone. "I feel as if all the world must be looking at you and wondering who you are!"

Viola laughed. "And I feel simply horrible, after that long night journey. And the sea was quite rough." She tried to make her voice sound cool and steady.

"We haven't far to go. By the way, your name is Mansfield. Miss Mansfield."

"Mansfield!" repeated Viola, completely mystified.

"You see, we must be very careful. So much depends upon our prudence, our discretion."

"Does it? I think I hate all this secrecy. It makes me feel there must be something wrong."

"Oh, I hoped you'd left all your scruples behind at the convent."

"A convent isn't the best place to get rid of scruples in."

He felt her mood to be tantalizing. Why couldn't she yield herself up wholly to the complete bliss of the present moment? He had looked forward to their meeting with an ardor which had seemed even to himself almost inexplicable. And she had come, looking more beautiful than ever. He told himself that he was more deeply in love with her than he had ever been.

"Still, you must have got rid of some of them or you wouldn't be here," he reminded her.

"I suppose not," she assented, a little wearily.

She had a longing then, to lean her face against his shoulder and cry. She was tired and miserable and even a little chilled, despite the bright warmth of the June day. And she had hoped and believed that to see Esmé again would mean nothing but happiness. His presence had always had the power to calm and soothe her.

She told herself that it was impossible to shake herself free all at once from the convent atmosphere. It had affected her very strongly, and it still made her feel that she had paid too high a price for this present happiness. She glanced at Esmé, at his hard, cold, clean-cut face. Less than ever could she cherish any hope that he would yield to her entreaties and allow the ceremony to take place in a Catholic church. She had tried to justify her action in coming, by the consoling thought that now he would certainly give in. She had clung to this false hope. But when she looked at him now, it died.

The cab stopped at last before a bleak little house, built of discolored brick. It had an unhappy, forlorn, smudged aspect, and was in truth a sordid little place. The very sight of it depressed her. Those murky lace curtains—that door of dull and blistered paint. How could Esmé have chosen such dismal lodgings for her?

And she would be alone here, perhaps for some weeks. She had never in her life been alone in such circumstances, and the prospect made her nervous.

The driver pulled up his horse, dismounted, seized her box and put it on the pavement. When the door was opened he almost flung it into the hall.

A woman stood on the doorstep.

"First floor, ain't it?" she asked, speaking with a sharp cockney accent.

"Yes—this is Miss Mansfield," said Esmé, loftily.

Viola began to feel an unreasoning dislike to the

name of Mansfield. She wondered why Esmé had chosen it.

He climbed the narrow steep little flight of stairs, and opened the first door on the right, disclosing a small sitting-room furnished as a drawing-room, with terrible pictures and photographs, a suite of chairs upholstered in crimson rep, a cabinet containing specimens of imitation china, a round table with a large green wool mat and a lamp standing upon it. There was a window screened by a pair of grimy lace curtains. Behind, through an open door, Viola saw a small square dark bedroom looking out upon a tiny grimy yard and overshadowed by the backs of the opposite houses.

"Not half bad, is it?" said Esmé, cheerfully.

"Oh, no. It'll do quite well."

The servant had left them, to see about bringing up the box, and they were alone in the sitting-room.

"Put up your veil, darling," said Esmé.

She obeyed him with trembling fingers.

"I must look hideous—" she said, with a pale little smile.

He drew her to him and kissed her.

She thought: "When he's here I forget everything. He must never let me remember . . ." But aloud she only said, "Esmé, Esmé!" and kissed and clung to him, like a child seeking comfort.

"How beautiful you are," he said, quietly, scanning her face with a close scrutiny. "Do you love me, Viola?"

"If I hadn't loved you more than all the world, I shouldn't be here to-day," she assured him.

He left her side to give some orders to the servant, who, with the help of a girl, was struggling to carry the trunk into the bedroom. Then he shut the door again and came back to the place where Viola was standing. He was aware of the depression that had come over her, and he attributed it to

the surroundings. They were gloomy, and the street certainly looked a very squalid one, despite the fact that it was barely ten minutes' walk from the Marble Arch. But it was only for a short time, and he hadn't dared get anything very expensive; she must try to make the best of it.

She was very pale, and her lips were closed in a hard firm line as if she were struggling to repress some powerful emotion. There were little purple stains of fatigue under her eyes. She looked both tragic and nervous.

"Sit down. You look half dead," he said.

Viola sat down on the hard sofa. Esmé sat by her side, with his arm clasped about her.

"What on earth made you write that letter to me?" he inquired, presently. "I tried to remember what I could possibly have said to provoke it!" His tone was slightly injured.

"I felt it was what you wanted me to write," said Viola. "You were attracted by Miss Clethorpe—you didn't try to hide it, your own letter was full of her. And I realized how much wiser and safer it would be for you to do just what Lord Bethnell wished."

"I have never made a fetish of filial duty," said Esmé, coolly.

"But this was an agreeable duty—" said Viola, bitterly.

Esmé took her hand and kissed it.

"Don't let's quarrel, darling. I've been looking forward to this more than you can quite realize."

She was instantly melted. When he spoke to her in that way, she found it impossible to resist him.

"Forgive me, Esmé," she said. "It was so difficult to believe you could really care for me. And everyone will say I'm not good enough. Whereas Miss Clethorpe . . ."

The thought of entering a family that denied

her welcome was hateful to her. They would be utterly indifferent to the sacrifice she had made. Her religion would always be hateful to them. It would prevent her from ever being quite acceptable. Did Esmé think of this? Did he ever look beyond the pleasure of the moment?

"Oh, don't think of all that dark ugly side," he said. "Our love is such a new beautiful thing—we ought to enjoy it."

She was silent, leaning against him, gaining a little comfort from the contact. Love had not come to her, as it came to so many women, in the guise of wonderful unalloyed happiness. There were complications and obstacles connected with it that pricked her continually; she seemed to be smarting perpetually from tiny wounds that in the aggregate were extremely painful.

"Yes, yes. I know. But I'm not accustomed to happiness, and I'm afraid of it."

"You are not very flattering," he said. Her attitude stung his pride. He felt that his love when bestowed should be productive of the most perfect happiness in the so favored recipient.

"Esmé, I'm tired. I shall be better when I've had a cup of tea and some sleep."

"Of course. But I've ordered tea—it ought to be ready soon. Did you travel straight through?"

"Yes."

"I hope you had a sleeper?"

"No. And the train was very full—I had to sit up all night."

"Oh, you shouldn't have done that!"

"I couldn't afford anything else. I'd come practically to the end of all my money."

"But didn't my mother—?"

"Oh, no. Of course if I'd traveled back with her it would have been different."

The servant brought in the tea. It was strong and bitter, and Viola could hardly drink it. She had a passionate longing to be alone, but Esmé seemed to be enjoying the little meal, disposing rapidly of the thick slices of bread-and-butter, from which Viola turned in inarticulate disgust.

She watched him, half-fascinated. He looked smart and well-groomed, and his new London clothes fitted him to perfection. His fair crinkled hair was brushed to a fine polish. She thought his eyes were strange and stealthy, like a cat's. His beautiful mouth was curved in a whimsical smile. She was sure that he didn't realize in the least how unhappy and frightened she was—how miserable she had been during the few weeks of their separation.

"Feeling better now?" he asked her, suddenly. He cherished a conviction that women were always hysterical when they were overtired. They couldn't really bear anything. . . .

"Yes, thank you. But I'm tired. I think I'd like to rest."

"Very well. I'll come back at seven to take you out to dine somewhere."

"No, please not, Esmé. If I want anything to eat I'll have it here. At present I only want to sleep."

His face fell. "Then I'm not to see you till to-morrow?"

"To-morrow—as early as you like. I always get up early."

"But I've a thousand things to tell you. And I must go back to Ardlesham to-morrow afternoon. I'm due at a dinner party."

"At the Clethorpes'?" she asked.

"Exactly—at the Clethorpes'." But his voice betrayed annoyance.

"You won't be away long?"

"Possibly a few days. They don't like my being away."

It was her turn to be disconcerted.

"Esmé, if you leave me here for very long by myself I shall go back to Cecily! I know I can't bear it here. These awful rooms—!" Her eyes flashed. He might so easily have found a more agreeable abode for her. This one had two merits in his eyes—it was obscure and therefore safe. That was no doubt why he had chosen it. His efforts to ensure secrecy at all costs, annoyed her. For, after all, there was no real need, if he had had the courage of a mouse.

"Do you really hate them so much? I thought they'd do all right for a few weeks."

"Do you think Miss Clethorpe would stay in them for an hour?" she demanded, passionately.

"But, my darling child—we've nothing to do with Miss Clethorpe!"

"And, then, if you leave me here and spend all your time at Ardlesham!"

"But don't you see, if I'm continually in and out people will begin to talk?"

"Who is there to talk?"

"Well, the landlady for one."

"She doesn't even know who I am!"

"These people have odd ways of finding out things."

"Well, who cares?"

"I care very much," he answered, stiffly. "Everything depends on our behaving prudently now. You're tired, Viola, and that makes you look at things in a distorted light."

He got up, took his hat and stick, and prepared for departure. When she saw that he was really going, she had an absurd impulse to beseech him to remain. It was only six o'clock, and if she went to bed now there was little likelihood of her falling

asleep for some hours to come. She would spend a wretched time, tossing upon what certainly promised to be a hard uncomfortable bed. She thought of her room at the convent with a passion of longing, its cleanliness, its simplicity, the light and air that poured in so bountifully from the Venetian sky. The tranquil ordered days she had spent there seemed so perfect in retrospect, that she wondered how she could ever have left those walls to embark upon this sordid adventure. She was so nervous, so exhausted with fatigue, she could hardly realize that she loved Esmé. Yet, surely she must love him or she wouldn't be here.

"I've been horrid—I've done nothing but quarrel," she said, with tears of remorse in her eyes.

"It's only because you're worn out. I ought to have seen it, and not tormented you about things."

She came up to him and timidly placed her hands on his shoulders lifting her face to his, just as a child might have done. "Esmé!"

He bent and kissed the lovely uplifted face.

"You do want me to be your wife?"

"I'm almost tired of telling you how much!" He smiled—that sweet whimsical smile that always dominated her. "Don't doubt me—don't doubt me—" he whispered, passionately.

"You'll come early to-morrow? Come at nine," she said.

"Right you are. And, mind, I want to see a very cheerful face, darling. We're going to be so happy, you know."

He went out of the room. After all, it was a relief to Viola to find herself alone. She felt less depressed when he had gone, and almost immediately she went into her bedroom and began to busy herself with the task of unpacking a few things for the night. Even this little occupation braced her nerves and made her feel more normal.

She hadn't been nice to Esmé. To-morrow she would make up for it and show him how charming she could be. She hoped he was not comparing her too unfavorably with Miss Clethorpe.

CHAPTER XIII

VIOLA went to bed early and soon fell asleep after the manner of healthy youth. She did not even wake to partake of food, but slept on until the summer dawn had whitened the sky. It was a beautiful day, and even here in this dingy London street a sweet freshness stole in through the open window, making her think of fields and flowers, and grass all drenched and white with dew. It was four o'clock. In another five hours' time Esmé would come. She must get up early so as to be quite ready when he came. The thought comforted her, and she turned over on her side and slept again. She looked very pretty lying thus, with her dark hair loose about her face, framing it in a soft dusky cloud. Her cheeks were flushed. She might have shed at least four of her eighteen years.

When she woke again, it was half past seven, and she rang the bell for some tea and hot water. Her head was clear, freed at last from the sound of whirling wheels that had echoed so disagreeably in her brain last night, making her feel as if she were still sitting cramped and wretched in that rushing train. The tea refreshed her, and she rose. She did her hair very carefully, and put on a pale gray dress of thin muslin. Then she went into the sitting-room to wait for Esmé.

Things looked decidedly brighter this morning, and she did not hate her surroundings quite so violently. She could almost feel that she was going to be happy here, quietly waiting for her wedding day.

The sun was shining with a soft hazy light that illuminated the little street, diminishing its dismal aspect. She watched some children at play, grubby rosy little people with tumbled flaxen hair. How pretty they were—the plump English babies. Viola had an almost absurd wish to go down and play with them, and kiss their smiling rosy faces. She loved children. Margery and Lionel had been the exception, they were such cold unresponsive little creatures, priggish, critical. Well, she would never have to return to that dreary uninspiring routine. Idly she wondered what Cecily would say if she could see her now, sitting alone in London lodgings, waiting for Esmé. Her sense of propriety would indubitably be shocked.

Viola wondered if Esmé would really insist upon going back to Ardlesham that afternoon. She felt that he ought for her sake to have given up that dinner party at the Clethorpes'. Her mind traveled on swiftly, and she began to picture Isolde with her dark hair and blue eyes, her slim willowy figure. Did she like Esmé? Had she fallen in love with him? -It would be difficult, perhaps, not to fall in love with Esmé—her own subjugation had been but the work of a few short hours. If it had only all been different. If Esmé had but been a poor man with his way to make in the world! She felt that she would have enjoyed rendering that personal service which falls to the poor man's wife. She would have liked to mend his clothes, to learn to cook his favorite dishes, and attend to his comfort; to feel, in fact, that in all the minor amenities of life she was absolutely necessary to him. But somehow she couldn't picture Esmé as poor. He always looked as if he had emerged from the hands of a highly accomplished valet, diligent and attentive. He could never be happy pinching and saving. And if he were to marry Miss Clethorpe, he would be in

possession of all that wealth could give. Lord Bethnell would surely be generous in the matter of settlements, if his son made a marriage so greatly to his liking.

A dull envy came over Viola. She wished that she could see this Isolde, her unconscious rival, in order to know, as one might say, the worst. Something of the old jealousy seized her. It must be so pleasant to meet Esmé in that bright, civilized, luxurious little world from which she herself was now so completely shut out. She was here in these dingy lodgings, an unlikely little bride. Hidden away by Esmé, just as if he had been ashamed of her.

Miss Malleeson—Aunt Hope . . . she still felt as if she were watching her now disapprovingly, just as for months and months after her death Viola had had a half superstitious feeling that she was watching her from another world, from which she would certainly have returned to punish her if she could. This feeling had kept her from being naughty long after that rigid disciplinarian had been laid to rest in the Catholic cemetery at Ardlesham.

Well, she wouldn't approve if she could see her now, that was quite certain. She had never liked Esmé even as a boy, and then she had always warned Viola against making a "mixed" marriage.

"She used to say I was weak and easily influenced," Viola thought. "I suppose she was right. Esmé makes me weak. I wonder why I'm so horrid to him when I love him so much? Perhaps it is because I never feel as if he were treating me quite fairly. He makes me do things I hate—like coming here. We do nothing but quarrel, just when I want only to be happy and think of his love."

Esmé was a little late, although he had made heroic efforts to be punctual, feeling that Viola, if still in the mood of yesterday, would certainly re-

sent any even inadvertent lack of eagerness on his part. Yesterday's meeting had been thoroughly unsatisfactory; he had never felt less sure of Viola, and the sudden dislike she had taken to the rooms had seemed to him a trifle exaggerated. But of course the whole truth was that she wanted to go to Ardlesham and be presented there as his future wife, and nothing less than Ardlesham would content her. . . .

He had been thoroughly spoilt since his return home, and the charming frank courtesy of Isolde's manner, her pretty way of receiving him and making him feel at home, contrasted strangely with Viola's resentful, almost hostile, attitude. But Esmé was in love, more deeply in love than perhaps he well knew, and he was able to tell himself that Isolde was only a beautiful artificial creature without personality or temperament, but taught and trained to be as effective as possible. Undoubtedly he would have married her if he had never seen Viola, and they would probably have jogged on quite well together, sharing the same worldly tastes, the same love of wealth, and of society in its more expensive and luxurious phases. But that step aside to join his mother at Venice had been a highly fateful move. There had been something so enchanting, so idyllic, about meeting his old playmate again in those romantic surroundings, to find too that she had become not only older but lovelier and more delicious in the interval. Even during his walk to see her that morning, he had been in imagination voyaging upon the lagoon with her under that broad dark sky scattered with stars; he saw again the dim silhouettes of tower and dome, and heard the fierce melancholy warning cry of the gondoliers, and the distant music throbbing its way across the water. He could feel the salt air flowing in from the Adriatic, and could visualize the sharp mountain peaks

rising in the distance as from a sea of mist, to float in the sky like immense icebergs, solemn and luminous in their remote cold austerity.

"I hope you're rested," he said, after their first greeting.

"Yes—I slept beautifully."

"That's good. Then we can discuss everything quite temperately."

"Yes—you needn't be afraid. I'm sorry I was so hateful yesterday. You were very patient, Esmé."

"I'm awfully sorry, of course, that I can't stay longer in London. But I simply must throw dust in all their eyes. So far, I really don't believe they've the slightest suspicion of the truth."

Viola was determined not to let him see that he had struck a wrong and jarring note; she wanted desperately to atone for yesterday's ill-humor.

"Then we must make the most of this morning," she told him, gayly.

But her gayety was forced, and there was something conscious and hard in the brilliance of her smile.

He was, however, completely deceived. "Darling, how well you understand," he murmured. She was wonderful to-day in her assured beauty, her recovered tenderness. There was a little interval of silence, and then he resumed:

"I took these rooms ten days ago and left my portmanteau here. So we've another eleven days, and then I must get a special license. By the way, I must add three years to your age—do you mind?"

"Will it be all right?"

"We shan't be imprisoned. That kind of offense is always treated leniently," he told her. "I'm not scrupulous, you know, when I've set my heart on anything. 'Let a man contend to his uttermost—' "

"And when shall I see you again?"

"Saturday, I hope. I mean to get off for the week-end. These next few days I'm down to play cricket at the Clethorpes'—they've got a match on."

"It wouldn't be possible to give it up?"

"No—I couldn't throw them over, having once promised. They'd have some difficulty in getting another man at the eleventh hour."

"To-day's only Tuesday," said Viola, ruefully.

Four days—four dreary lonely days without a single glimpse of Esmé. And she needed his presence to keep her resolutions firm and steady. Left to herself she would certainly be—as she had been at the convent in Venice—a prey to her own scruples.

"I'm sorry, I can't help it." There was a slight tinge of impatience in his voice. "By the way, you said something silly yesterday about going back to your brother's house. Understand, Viola, there's to be no nonsense of that kind. If you do go back you'll never see me again. I shall understand that the old superstitions have triumphed."

The authoritative ring in his voice was not without its effect. She felt, too, the force of his words. Never to see Esmé again, with his tormenting eyes, his whimsical smile, his hardness, his egoism, his tenderness. Never to hear his voice, his words of love. And then, on the other hand, to be freed once and forever from this consciousness of sin, tangled about with a maze of lying and deceit. It would be the negation of the kind of happiness she had known during the last few weeks, but it would spell peace, and there would be relief too in escape. Something in her face, some indication of hesitation, made him say sharply:

"What do you intend to do? This sort of shilly-shallying is most unsettling. I won't have you playing fast and loose with me. If you don't mean to marry me, you'd better say so. But if you do, I tell

you clearly you must leave all the arrangements to me. You must just listen and obey."

Anxiety, a touch of anger, had made him turn white. Viola felt a strange little fear of him; her limbs trembled slightly. The sensation of fear was not wholly unpleasant, it was even a little bracing, and it gave to her love a new quality.

And then her heart sank afresh. She longed for the quiet peace and solitude of the convent, where human love played so small a part, and charity so great a one.

"Don't be angry with me, Esmé," she murmured, clutching his arm and looking up into his face. But the hard expression did not soften, nor did the grim lines of the mouth relax. Oh, she could remember so well how he had always hated to be thwarted—how angry it had made him as a boy if one didn't immediately accede to his plans! In his essential egoism he was wholly unable to apprehend the scruples and difficulties of another.

"I really haven't the slightest intention of going back to Percival," she said, after a little pause. The silence was getting on her nerves, and she was aware that he was waiting for some assurance of fidelity and constancy on her part.

"Somehow, I never feel sure of you," he said, in a mollified tone. He bent his head and kissed her. "It would kill me to lose you," he whispered.

"Where shall we be married? Have you settled on a church?" she inquired.

"Oh, yes—that'll be all right," said Esmé, evasively.

He counted upon her simplicity and ignorance as an essential factor in the success of his carefully devised scheme. But Percival was a lawyer, and he would have no betrayal to Percival of the contemplated wedding. Lawyers could be counted upon to put their dry legal fingers on the weak spot.

"You wouldn't—you wouldn't let me see about a dispensation, Esmé?— It would make me much happier. . . ."

"Most certainly not, Viola darling. You must believe that I know best, and leave me to manage things in my own way. You promise not to play any tricks behind my back, don't you? I must have your word of honor!"

"Oh, my *honor!*" she said, with a sudden bitterness.

"Why? What on earth do you mean?"

"I—I shall have bartered it," she answered, her eyes dark with gloom.

"Nonsense!" said Esmé. "You mustn't be so morbid. Of course I understand it—you've been frightened with these bogies of purgatory and hell all your life, so you're afraid of happiness, afraid of everything that is pleasant. Give me your promise, Viola, your promise of secrecy—of faithfulness."

"I promise," she said, faintly

Esmé smiled. "I can trust you, I know. You're different from other women."

"Yes. You'd never get Miss Clethorpe to do what I'm doing," she said, bitterly.

His smile vanished. The face was once more like a stone mask.

"There'd be no need. We should be smothered, suffocated, with blessings. Besides, Miss Clethorpe is in a very different position from yourself. She's always led a very guarded and sheltered life. Within certain defined limits she has complete liberty. But one would not dare suggest any adventurous or unconventional course to her. I don't think courage and independence of character number among her strong points."

"And are they among mine?" Her voice still held that veiled bitterness.

"Yes. Of course with you they haven't been allowed to flourish. You've been brought up in a medieval tradition that encourages scruples. Otherwise I believe you'd be one of the finest freest spirits in the whole world." There was a subtle flattery in his tone. "It's wonderful what you've done already. I mean coming here like this—so many girls would have hesitated. I never knew anyone so little afraid. I suppose it is because you're not afraid of anything or anyone in this world—only of what might possibly come afterward in another."

His praise soothed her, lulling that instinctive envy of the guarded and sheltered Miss Clethorpe, to whom no one would have dared to propose any straying from the path of strict convention. Esmé respected that worldly code, and would not have invited her to sin against it. But for Viola's religious code he had no respect at all. He simply ignored it, as trivial, childish and medieval, and wished her to show a like indifference and disdain. And yet it pleased her that he should think her courageous, fearless, independent, although she was aware that this character hardly fitted the woman who had been cruelly torn to pieces by religious scruples during her solitary weeks at the convent. But Esmé knew nothing of those tormenting, unhappy, restless days. He did not in the least understand how the thought of "what might come afterward, in another world," could render anyone timorous.

"Miss Clethorpe will make a highly conventional marriage when the time comes," he continued, "and the Archbishop of Canterbury or the Bishop of the diocese will probably perform the rite. There will be an unusual number of bridesmaids, a larger cake than anyone has ever had before, and the honeymoon will be spent in the most luxurious hotel on the Italian Lakes." His eyes held a mocking light.

"It must be lovely getting married like that,"

said Viola. She didn't of course want the Archbishop of Canterbury, nor the probably very worthy Bishop of the diocese, for she had been brought up without any proper regard for these exalted beings. But she would have liked the bridesmaids, the cake, the joyous publicity of it all, the friends and relations looking on with smiles and even tears of happy approval. No secrets, no lies, no clandestine meetings snatched, as it were, furtively and illicitly. Love was too beautiful to be stowed away in dark corners as if it were something shameful. It wasn't shameful, for she and Esmé had as much right to love each other, to get engaged and married, as any two people in the world. . . .

"Whereas, we shall be married very early in the morning with possibly only the verger looking on. And then we shall go—where shall we go, Viola?"

"To Venice?" she suggested.

"I'm afraid funds will hardly run to such a long journey," said Esmé, "and then it would swallow up too much of our time. There's a nice little place on the French coast where we shouldn't be likely to run across anyone we know. And it's not too far."

"Shall I go to Ardlesham when we're married?" she asked. There was never any mention of Ardlesham when he spoke of future plans, and the omission struck her as significant.

"Of course you will—directly I've smoothed the way for you. But we must be very prudent at first. It wouldn't do to spring a surprise upon them at an unpropitious moment."

"No, I suppose not," said Viola.

The future as he traced it seemed formless and nebulous. She longed to show him how rebellious she felt at this prospect of continued secrecy.

"Oh, my darling, I do so depend upon you to help me to straighten things out! I shall need all your wise help, your discretion, your courage, your

silence—" He made the appeal with something of entreaty, but it failed to move her.

"I shall be completely in your hands, Esmé, whether I'm wise or helpful or discreet or not. When I'm your wife I suppose it will be my duty to obey you—" She looked at him curiously. It wouldn't be easy—that rule at once so authoritative, so self-seeking. It might even grind fine, and she would suffer under it. "All the same, I do wish you'd tell your mother."

"Tell my mother? But, darling, don't you realize that would mean the end of everything? My mother's simply set her heart on my marrying Miss Clethorpe—she's more keen on it even than my father. Men don't go in for match-making so much, as a rule. He'd like it and all that, but he'd never push me either way."

"I wonder if I shall ever see her. I'd like to see her—the girl you would have married if you'd never met me."

"Oh, she's pretty enough," he said, "like a dainty exquisite flower. And everything about her is wonderfully perfect. I don't know much about women's clothes, but hers always look absolutely new and fresh. She's got the prettiest little feet and hands, and dark, almost black, hair and blue eyes."

"She's everything that I'm not," thought Viola, with a dull envy. She glanced almost with dismay at her simple gray muslin frock. It had cost so little and of course she had worn it many times, it couldn't possibly look fresh and new. Her hands and feet were not small, for she was a tall woman, but they were slender and very shapely. Yet she saw herself less beautiful, less finished and dainty, than this rich girl who was her rival, and she felt dissatisfied and unhappy.

She had often seen women with that *soigné*, pol-

ished, perfect look; it invariably signified wealth and leisure, an accomplished maid, and expensive frocks continually replenished. She knew exactly what Miss Clethorpe must look like. She could picture her quite accurately. And she was pretty into the bargain—she had everything to tempt and attract. . . .

“All the same, she’s not worth the tip of your little finger,” continued Esmé. “Of course, she’s a great catch. By the way, she’s a wonderful little horsewoman—hunts regularly in the season. Sir Timothy always sees that she’s perfectly mounted.”

“Oh, you’ve ridden together?”

“Sometimes—she isn’t allowed to ride alone. Sir Timothy adores her, and gives her every mortal thing she wants. But he doesn’t like her to go outside the Park alone—she always has a companion. Her sitting-room is full of the most delicious old furniture and prints and a quantity of books, and with her piano and flowers it’s the prettiest place you ever saw.”

“What would she say to this room?” said Viola.

Esmé laughed. “I don’t suppose she’s ever seen anything remotely resembling it!”

“Please don’t tell me anything else about her, Esmé—I would rather not hear it. I shall begin to be frantically envious if you tell me any more.” Although her tone was light enough, he was aware that she was serious. But he wanted her to feel the beginnings of jealousy where Miss Clethorpe was concerned—just enough to convince her that she was enormously fortunate to have been chosen by him for his future wife despite the potent allure of these rival charms.

“I like you to be jealous, Viola!” he said, gayly.

“It hurts, though,” she acknowledged.

“Oh, I can’t let you be hurt! And in a fortnight

you'll be my wife—you mustn't grudge me these last days of bachelor freedom," he told her.

"But you'll be seeing her every day."

"Yes. Every single day."

"Don't tease me, Esmé. It's the thought of your staying there that I hate so."

"It's my second visit."

"Perhaps she thinks you want to marry her."

"If she does, it isn't my fault."

"I feel you're not quite fair to her. I wish you could tell her," said Viola.

He leaned back and rocked with laughter.

"You do make the most extraordinary suggestions!"

The morning wore away. It hadn't been a peaceful or a happy time, Viola reflected, wretchedly. When twelve o'clock struck, Esmé sprang up almost with relief.

"You'd better get ready and come out to lunch somewhere. The earlier we are, the less likely we shall be to meet anyone we know."

Always that caution—that prudence. And she felt so indifferent—she wouldn't have minded meeting all her little world, including Esmé's parents. She wanted everyone to know that she was engaged—she would have welcomed discovery and revelation. She hadn't done anything she was ashamed of, except perhaps coming to these rooms in this sly and secret way. She envied Isolde's guarded sheltered life, surrounded by a careful and loving vigilance. Esmé's exaggerated prudence always aroused within her a mute resentment. He might have been—perhaps indeed he was—ashamed of her.

They went to a restaurant in Regent Street. At such an early hour they were almost the only people there, except a group of Italians to whom a twelve o'clock luncheon was a necessity. Esmé chose a quiet corner, and made Viola sit with her back to

the light. In public he always wished that her beauty was of a less conspicuous and arresting character. People seeing such a face even if only casually, would be little likely to forget it. And she was too tall not to be remarked. Once when she laughed at something he had said, he exclaimed abruptly: "For goodness' sake don't laugh so loud!"

She felt then as if he had struck her in the face, and a little spot of crimson showed in each cheek. It was unreasonable, of course, to feel so hurt. Percival might have said that to her without even eliciting a sisterly retort. She supposed it was because she loved Esmé so much, that she had bestowed upon him this facile ready power to wound her. Her laughter had a silvery rippling sound, and she had not realized its delicious individual quality. But Esmé had realized it, and he hated that it should be heard.

Viola ate very little. Esmé made her drink some white wine. When luncheon was over, they had coffee and he smoked. No women smoked in public in the 'nineties, and even those who indulged in the habit in private, were apt to be stigmatized as "fast." Esmé therefore did not offer her a cigarette.

"What time is your train, Esmé?"

"Four."

"It'll be hot traveling."

"Yes, but delicious when one gets there. Ardlesham is divine in this June weather. I shall probably find my mother sitting under the cedars and having tea. You remember those cedars on the lawn, Viola?"

"Oh, yes," said Viola. The picture he had drawn was an alluring one. The cool spaciousness of Ardlesham made an almost terrible contrast to her present abode. She envied Esmé going back to that

lovely home of his. It was so airless, so stifling, in London now. Oh, why couldn't he take her back with him? It would be so easy—just a few words of explanation, of telling his parents that he loved his old playmate Viola Hudson, and couldn't live without her, and therefore they must forgive him. Every day that passed would make it more difficult for him to utter that confession.

"Does your mother ever speak of me?" she asked.

"Not often—only once, I think."

It had been, as he well remembered, to tell him that once she *had* felt a little anxious about him and Viola—such a pretty nice-mannered girl but quite unsuitable—she was glad that he had realized it wouldn't be wise to let that friendship go any further. All charmingly maternal . . . and no more had been said. The subject had been tacitly dropped, and thenceforward Isolde's name was continually on Lady Bethnell's lips. Such a sweet creature, and intelligent too. So charming, so gifted. . .

"I'm afraid Lady Bethnell doesn't care for me any more. And she did like me up to the time you came to Venice," said Viola.

She was thinking of that foggy January morning when Lady Bethnell had come to see her, and almost commanded her to get ready to travel abroad with her. There had been a genuine frank friendliness in her attitude, exhilarating, invigorating, chasing away fogs and cobwebs and everything that kept the light and purity of day from one. And now Lady Bethnell hadn't even answered one of the letters Viola had written from the convent in Venice.

"And she'll like you again when you're her daughter-in-law," he assured her, with a gay confidence he was very far from experiencing.

He had finished his cigarette and now he rose and moved toward the street door. She followed him. The air was heavy and stifling. Overhead the blue

sky was covered by a light haze that obscured its midsummer radiance.

"Where are we going now, Esmé?"

"Back to your lodgings, my child."

"But it's so early. Couldn't we sit in the Park a little?"

"No—there isn't time. Besides, we might meet someone."

"Is Miss Clethorpe in London?"

"How can I tell? But, as a matter of fact, they don't intend to come up till July. She was in town all May and part of June—she's tired of it. And Sir Timothy hates London."

"Oh! They've got a house here?" she asked.

"Yes—in Berkeley Square."

They drove back to the little gray street. It looked more squalid and sordid than ever, Viola thought, and it wounded her afresh to think that Esmé had considered it good enough for her. He must have known she would have detested its dinginess.

"It's no good your writing, in fact it's better not," he told her, when they were sitting in the little front room. "I'll write to you if I possibly can. But there'll be the difficulty of posting while I'm at Riversedge. And then there won't be much time. We shall have some strenuous days what with the cricket, and dancing at night."

"Dancing?" she repeated. She was barely eighteen and her passion for dancing was still wholly unsatisfied. She wondered what it would be like to dance with Esmé.

"Yes. Won't it be topping?"

She assented lukewarmly. Then: "Does Miss Clethorpe dance well?"

"They say she's the best dancer in the neighborhood. I suppose I shall soon be able to judge for myself."

Viola wanted to cling to his hand and cry out:

"Don't go—don't go . . . I can't bear it!" But such a speech would inevitably annoy Esmé. He would only regard her as a tiresome, hysterical little fool. She pictured Isolde, calm, indifferent, cool and alluring. Not really caring perhaps whether Esmé intended to marry her or not. He was probably only one of several eligible aspirants. Not all her world! . . .

"I must be going soon. I don't want to miss this train, otherwise I shall be late for dinner. Sir Timothy's nearly as bad as Dad about punctuality and that kind of thing."

"Oh, don't go yet, Esmé. There are so many things I still want to ask you about."

"What things, darling?"

"Ought I to order . . . my wedding dress? It takes a little time, you know."

"Darling child, a wedding dress! Why of course not! You won't want one. You must be married in your usual kit—something dark and quiet . . ."

"Oh," said Viola, with obvious disappointment in her tone.

No white satin or orange-blossoms or veil of old lace. She had one that had belonged to her mother. Something dark and quiet . . .

He was in a hurry to go, obviously afraid of missing his train. He had to go back to the club and pick up his things. She felt that he was anxious to depart; it gave to their last few precious moments together a sense of hurry and rush.

"Good-by, my darling. Keep as invisible as you can. Saturday will soon be here, and you must promise to be very good and patient."

"Yes, yes, Esmé."

"I know it's a bit trying here for you. But it's necessary or I shouldn't insist."

"Yes—I quite understand."

"Good-by," said Esmé.

He put his arms round her and kissed her many times.

"Darling, darling, I love you," he said.

"And I love you, dear Esmé," she whispered.

It struck her afterward that their one really happy moment together was that when they had kissed each other good-by. They seemed to have spent so much of their short time together in acrimonious discussions that just did not amount to actual quarreling. It was entirely her own fault, she told herself reproachfully. All her questions had been inspired by a little tingling jealousy and suspicion.

CHAPTER XIV

AFTER Esmé had gone, Viola felt unhappy, conscience-stricken, restless. She kept saying to herself: "You've no right to marry him without a dispensation. You deserve to be punished. You will be punished. You know," with an odd echo of Miss Malleson's ominous *cliché*, "the consequences of disobedience." It wasn't, as she fully realized, a trivial thing to disobey one of the Church's laws.

Esmé had foreseen that, left to herself, she would once more become the prey of these scruples. That was why he had urged silence and patience and prudence. He wanted to make himself quite safe, to hedge himself about with all kinds of protective measures. She must help him to carry out the secret plan he had so coldly and deliberately formed. But it was hateful to be here alone in these dismal surroundings and picture him returning to Ardlesham, to enjoy all the easy luxury of a great wealthy house. She thought with envy of Ardlesham, and of its cool green garden, its dim woods, the scent of flowers, the tall pure lilies, heavily fragrant, the mists of blue

delphiniums, the stately herbaceous borders, with the gnarled apple-trees forming a gray background for all that wonderful glory of color. The murmurs of the country in midsummer weather. . . . She felt an aching desire to be there. And then this evening Esmé would drive over to Riversedge and dine and dance with Isolde Clethorpe. That was the worst thought of all. However much he might love her, there were certain ways in which she must necessarily compare unfavorably with Isolde.

After breakfast the next morning, Viola went in an omnibus cityward. Those were the days of horse omnibuses, a leisurely, unhurried means of transit, yet infinitely preferable to the choking sulphurous alternative adventure offered by the Underground. Viola used to think that all the accumulated fogs and smoke of London had settled in those baleful tunnels, filling them eternally with suffocating, noxious fumes. One emerged therefrom with nose and eyes saturated with black malodorous air, and face and garments smudged with grime.

Confident that she would meet no one whom she knew, she climbed to the top, enjoying the freshness of the morning air, and the touch of a light cool wind. When the 'bus stopped at Aldgate, she descended, crossed the road, and walked down the Minories with its historical Catholic associations. There was a church close by, as she knew—the Church of the English Martyrs on Tower Hill. No one would be likely to recognize her; she had only been there once before, and that was to a wedding. She had always felt afraid, since her return, to go into one of the big West End churches, for fear of meeting someone she knew.

She entered the church and knelt down before the beautiful Altar of Our Lady of Grace, gleaming like a white jewel in its somber setting of gray gloom. She remembered it from her former visit when it had

impressed her with its rare beauty. Within, it was very silent, and only a faint rumble of the City traffic reached her ears, like a far-off sustained murmur of sound, muffled, mysterious.

Directly she knelt down, a strange restlessness seized her. Why had she come? It was useless to come and pray when one had deliberately consented to a course of action that was in itself sinful. There was no room for sophistry here, no compromise, no easy salving of conscience with half-truths. A thing was right or it was quite clearly wrong. You couldn't have it, so to speak, both ways. The Church's laws offered no relaxation for a special case. You couldn't even plead ignorance, since information was easily obtainable. But you couldn't offend, deliberately and maliciously, and still claim the divine consolations of the Church. Those were for the penitent, the contrite sinner; for the prodigal who had cast away the husks and went meekly with down-bent head, and hand on heart, saying, "*Father, I have sinned against heaven and before Thee . . .*"

The tears gushed to her eyes. Paradoxically she had never thought so much about her religion, realized its power so completely, as she had done during these last weeks of deliberately planned rebellion. It was useless now to fall back upon the old formula: "God won't punish me for loving Esmé." She thought of the Two Standards, and knew that she intended to cross the stream and join that standard which was in direct opposition to that of Christ.

Glimpses of Esmé passed chaotically before her eyes. His hard, clean-cut, handsome face, the well-brushed crinkly hair, the green eyes, the long graceful limbs. She could hear his voice, now divinely tender, now sharply authoritative, producing within her a little thrill of fear. The wedding dress . . . something dark and quiet . . . *Don't laugh so loud, for goodness' sake . . .* She shivered with resent-

ment even in retrospect. When he disagreed with her, there was such cold scorn in his voice.

He was too certain of her love. If he had been less certain he would have behaved more chivalrously. Did men always despise a woman who consented to marry them clandestinely?

And, then, Esmé set her religion aside almost as if it didn't exist or, at best, was merely something with which to frighten children. He didn't realize its awful power—the way it *held* you. . . .

She rose and wandered round the church, pausing before each altar. Presently she met a priest coming from the sacristy. In his hand he held a bag and he was walking quickly, as if bent on some urgent errand. But he stopped and asked her if she wished to go to confession.

"No . . . no, thank you," stammered Viola.

He bowed and passed on toward the door. Perhaps he had been afraid that she might ask for a priest too late, when none was available. These priests in large poor missions were often highly overworked men, with scant leisure. But his question had startled her, and it was only after he had disappeared that she realized she had, for the second time, rejected a proffered opportunity.

. . . Almighty God did not desire the death of a sinner; time after time He offered the means by which one might return to Him, receive His pardon and regain His friendship. He didn't leave you quite alone. He *wanted* you. But His laws were very stern, implacable, unchangeable even in a world of change. You had the necessary strength to obey them if you chose, and you had the awful power to reject them if it pleased you. If she had spoken of these things to Esmé, he would have thrown his head back and rocked with laughter. We were here, in this world, he would say, to be happy, to enjoy ourselves. We followed the instincts that God had

given us—if there was a God. Esmé had less respect for the Catholic Church than anyone she had ever met.

But it was horrible, nevertheless—this sense of having had a door opened to you, help offered to you, and of having turned away in dumb but persistent refusal. Yet, if she had gone to confession now, there would have been an end of her present solitary life, of the secret marriage. She would have been obliged, in order to make a valid confession, to reveal the step she was about to take.

She wandered out into the little gray East End street. But it wasn't nearly so squalid as the street where she was living now. These prim little houses dated from the days of Queen Anne, and had once formed part of quite a fashionable quarter when the Court sojourned annually at the Tower and journeyed by river on splendid, decorated barges. The air, too, blew freshly here, as if to remind one of the nearness of the Thames. Viola passed a narrow alley, darkened and overshadowed by high walls that rose blankly on each side of it. The name was written up—Magdalen Passage. To her it looked a sinister spot, as if crimes might easily be committed there under cover of night. A cat crept stealthily past her, and vanished over the wall, uttering its baleful cry.

She walked on to Aldgate, and there waited for the omnibus that was to take her back to the Marble Arch. But when she reached Holborn she descended and walked, threading her way cautiously through the streets that lay behind Oxford Street. She was afraid of meeting Cecily, who was fond of shopping in those parts. Esmé had imbued her with his own fierce dread of discovery. If Cecily saw her alone like this in London when she was supposed by everyone to be still in Venice, she would certainly never rest until she had learned the whole truth. And she

would be suspicious, and shocked. She wouldn't think it respectable for Viola to be living alone in London lodgings. She would take it for granted that something was quite seriously amiss. Viola would be in disgrace, and Cecily would write triumphantly to George and Matthew and tell them how wicked she was and how deceitful. Probably she would end by saying that Catholics were always deceitful—you could never trust them! To believe that was part of Cecily's Protestant code. And yet Viola had heard Cecily lie quite glibly to Percival more than once, generally about the children. But you could lie and no one said rude things about your religion as long as you were a Protestant . . .

Viola felt almost thankful to find herself back, safe and undiscovered, in her dingy lodgings. She had few books with her and no work to do, and the time hung heavily. To-morrow she would go out early and make some purchases and begin to fashion a few things for her trousseau. It seemed so poor to have no trousseau at all. And her clothes were shamefully shabby with the exception of one or two frocks, almost too thin to wear in England, that Lady Bethnell had given her. Viola was a good needlewoman; she had learnt to sew both under Miss Malleeson's ægis and also when she was at school, but she was often too lazy to work. When she was married she supposed she would have a maid who would do everything for her. But in the meantime it would help her to pass the time if she made some necessities for her trousseau.

The next afternoon brought a letter from Esmé, quite short and evidently written in a great hurry. He had made fifty runs for the Riversedge side and taken four wickets for only sixteen runs, and Sir Timothy was delighted and said he had won the match for them. Evidently he was in high favor. They had danced the first night up till nearly two—a

bad preparation for cricket. Still, he hadn't felt a bit tired, everyone was so cheery and full of spirits, and he was enormously fit. He was longing for Saturday to come. And he loved his beautiful, darling Viola. . . .

The letter cheered her. She would have liked to answer it, but Esmé had forbidden her to write. He wouldn't run any risks. He protected himself at all points. She wondered how many times he had danced with Isolde. Whether the girl had fallen in love with him—he was, alas, so essentially lovable! Perhaps, too, he had made her believe that he admired her immensely. And Sir Timothy and the Bethnells looking on perhaps, watching them with quiet satisfaction, hoping that the young people would soon understand each other . . .

She took up her work again, and sewed all through the stifling June afternoon, till her head and eyes ached frantically under the strain. Sewing only stimulated the terrible activity of her thoughts. She was back in Venice, on the lagoon, at night with Esmé. Then at the convent, listening with outward calm and inward agitation to Mother Gabrielle's wise, kind phrases. And then yesterday, in the great dim East End church, murky and blackened with fumes and smoke, but possessing that wonderful pale jewel, the Altar of Our Lady of Grace. *Our Lady of Grace, pray for me . . . Hail Mary, full of Grace . . .*

Viola had always loved the Mother of Our Lord. When she was little she had taken all her childish troubles to her, her petty acts of disobedience, the pain of subsequent punishment when body and soul seemed alike to be smarting, her rare joys that had even then always been associated with Esmé. She could remember those simple prayers. "Do please pray that it may be fine to-morrow, because I'm asked to tea at Ardlesham Park, and Aunt Hope

says I'm not to go if it's wet." And then later: "Oh, thank you, thank you for the lovely afternoon. I did try to be good. . . ." She had felt always that the Madonna was kinder than Aunt Hope, and loved her more, and understood her better. She would have been patient, and perhaps wouldn't have punished little childish offenses with that relentless severity. . . .

And now—of this Viola felt quite certain—the dear Madonna was watching her. Praying perhaps that she might not succumb to temptation. She wanted Viola to be good. It wounded her most sorrowful Heart to see people bent upon offending and displeasing Her Beloved Son. "Our Lady of Grace . . . pray for me . . ." Viola repeated the words almost with passion.

The world was a cruel tangle. The knowledge of her own gift of free-will appalled her. And the precise nature of the Church's teaching left one in no doubt as to what was right and what was wrong. It was all clear and definite and simple. And you were quite free to adopt which course you chose. You couldn't say, though, if you were a Catholic, that you had been coerced, overpersuaded, or were the victim of undue influence. Always you were left with your wonderful, dreadful gift of free-will . . .

People would, of course, say that she had been overruled by Esmé Craye, a man so much older, so much more experienced than herself. But she would always know that the ultimate decision had rested with herself, and that she had had, moreover, abundant spiritual help all through that time of trial and temptation. Help that she had, alas, deliberately rejected . . .

There were moments when the alternative presented considerable attraction, and at such times she would picture herself going back to her brother's house, telling him all that had passed, asking his

legal advice and opinion. Then she would write and tell Esmé that she had "given the show away." Percival would certainly call her a little fool for her pains, and tell her that if she married a man of Esmé's position she couldn't expect to make terms. She would be jolly lucky to catch him, and ought to thank her stars for her good fortune. And Percival would not be likely to leave it at that, he would probably write to Lord Bethnell about the question of settlements.

That would make Esmé hate her. No, she had gone too far. She had weighed the pros and cons, made her decision, given her solemn promise. She couldn't be a coward now. And she loved Esmé—that was the real reason of her decision. Loved him so much that she couldn't send him out of her life forever. She loved him, and she intended to be his wife, come what might.

"We shall be perfectly happy," she said, aloud. "Perfectly happy."

It was only just now that his perpetual insistence upon the necessity of prudence and secrecy annoyed and irritated her. But when he had announced their marriage, that cloud would automatically melt. And if she were careful and tactful, surely in time he would come to think much better of her religion; he would see it was an integral part of her life; he would be kind and lenient about it. And then perhaps later on he would learn to love it, too.

She returned to her sewing with renewed assiduity. And the day after to-morrow Esmé would come.

CHAPTER XV

THE days dragged past wearily. Early on the Saturday morning a telegram came, to say Esmé could not get away till Monday. Two more days . . .

June had yielded to July. London was wrapped in a suffocating heat, sultry, overcast, airless. When Viola thought of the valley of Ardlesham—surely one of the most beautiful of Hampshire valleys—with the woods and downs spreading above and beyond it, a fierce nostalgia seized her. She was wretched in London; the close confinement to those stuffy lodgings was beginning to affect her health. No wonder Esmé didn't care to leave the country now. Perhaps he was still at Riversedge. Perhaps he was beginning genuinely to care for Isolde, realizing that he had made a mistake. A little cold shiver of jealousy swept her from head to foot. Perhaps . . . after all . . . she wasn't to be allowed to achieve her threatened act of rebellion. She was going to be forcibly prevented. It did sometimes happen that you were arrested on the very threshold. But she had gone too far—she couldn't bear it now. If she couldn't be Esmé's wife, she would far rather die than live. He was everything to her—everything. . . .

She was pale and wan, with deep purple rims under her eyes, by the time Esmé did appear at a fairly early hour on Monday morning. How trim and *soigné* he looked, fresh, vigorous and eminently self-satisfied. Certainly the visit to Riversedge must have been a complete success.

Viola rose from her seat near the window and came toward him, half eagerly, half timorously.

"Darling, how glum you look! Has anything happened?" said Esmé, with just a shade of irritation in his voice.

"You would be glum if you'd been alone in this heat for six whole days," replied Viola, in spirited fashion. But her smile reassured him. It was good to see him again.

"I expect I should," he agreed; "still, you know I simply couldn't help myself, Viola."

"Were you at Riversedge all the time?"

"Yes. I left there this morning. I sent a message over to Ardlesham to say I was unexpectedly called to London."

"Did you enjoy it very much?"

"Very much indeed. It's a ripping place, and they'd some awfully nice people staying there. By the way, I've got a rival—Lord Herringham. Twenty-five and his own father—lucky chap! Pots of money and making the running all the way."

"Oh, will they be married?" asked Viola, a trifle breathlessly.

"Well, I shouldn't wonder," said Esmé. He had been very slightly jealous of Herringham. It was one thing to tell yourself that you didn't want to marry a girl, and quite another to see her suddenly engaged in bestowing her pretty favors elsewhere.

"Does Sir Timothy approve?"

"He'd be a fool not to prefer an old family to a new one," said Esmé, who had not been left at all in doubt upon the subject. But Sir Timothy might have discerned signs of delay and philandering in Esmé, a want perhaps of serious purpose. He was quite capable of sending for an eminently eligible rival.

"Do you think Miss Clethorpe prefers Lord Herringham?" inquired Viola.

"I didn't ask her," said Esmé, curtly. "Anyhow, they're not engaged yet, and I was invited to stay on. But I knew your patience was limited, and I thought it was safer to come up and see you."

This speech gave her the impression that he had reluctantly torn himself away from Riversedge. Was it because by so doing he had left his rival alone in the field? She put the thought from her. He ought not to care in the least if Isolde married Lord Herringham or not.

"We must be married very soon, Viola; there are

rumors of wars—there always are, you know—on the frontier, and I may be called back before my leave is up.”

“Do you mean you might have to go soon?”

“Yes,” said Esmé. “And anyhow I’m due to start early in September.”

India in September. She exclaimed: “Oh, how lovely, Esmé!”

He gave her a perplexed look. “Well, I thought you might take it badly,” he said. “Women always spring surprises on one.”

“But, Esmé, don’t you realize? I’m simply longing to go out to India! It’ll be the loveliest adventure.” Her eyes shone.

“Well, unless I’ve told my parents before then, I can’t possibly take you,” he said, slowly.

“Not take me? But Esmé—you’ve promised to tell them. And of course I must come with you. When I’m your wife I shall go everywhere with you, and I’ve always longed to travel.”

“There’s no ‘of course’ about it,” said Esmé, steadily, looking straight in front of him. “And at present I think it’s extremely doubtful whether I shall tell them beforehand.”

Although he did not meet her eyes, his face was hard and unflinching.

“Esmé!” she cried in anguish. He heard the sound of a quick sob. Rising hastily, he went across to her and put his arm round her.

“But if there’s war, darling, it would be impossible. I couldn’t take you up to the frontier! And what would you do alone in India?”

“I suppose I should do what other women do when their husbands are away,” she answered.

“I’d rather think of you as safely in England,” he said, kissing her. She leaned against him. She couldn’t think of that future without him—spent as his unacknowledged wife.

"Don't you really feel as if you could face it, darling?"

She felt that he was offering her her freedom. But the gift was too bitter. Oh, she could bear anything if she only had his love! She said briefly: "I can face everything."

"That's my own brave darling," he whispered.

"But, Esmé—if you went away for a very long time—"

"Well, it would certainly be pretty rotten for us both," he said.

She wondered where she would live, if he left her alone in England. Whether he would give her leave to tell Percival and Cecily of her marriage. But she simply could not let her thoughts dwell upon such a monstrous hypothesis. When she was his wife she would insist upon accompanying him everywhere. She would refuse to be thrust out of sight. She would *make* him tell his parents. And if he refused she would herself tell Lady Bethnell.

"How long shall you be in London this time, Esmé?" she asked.

"Only till to-morrow morning. They'll be beginning to get restless at Ardlesham if I stay away any longer."

Her heart sank. She was aware that in all things he only consulted his own pleasure and convenience, and thus she knew he was returning home because he preferred to be there. He would leave her alone without a thought for her misery, her solitude.

"Isn't it awful," she said smiling, though with a suspicion of a quiver in her voice, "the way we quarrel and disagree all the very short time we are together? Esmé—I believe I'm getting bad-tempered—I used never to be like this. You mustn't think you're marrying a cross woman—I'm not really cross—I don't know what's the matter with me."

"Oh, well, it's a rotten sort of engagement for

you, and I don't wonder you're fed up with being alone. But, Viola darling, you must believe that if it were only possible I'd take you down to Ardlesham this very day and make a clean breast of the whole affair. But it would be a most fatal mistake. They'd never forgive me. They—they are ambitious for me. Can't you see that it's hard for me too, because I feel it's better for me to come here as little as possible? And I *want* to be with you—half the time I'm simply eating my heart out!"

He kissed and comforted her, and under the spell of his words Viola grew very calm and quiet. She did not speak, but leaned her head against his shoulder and shut her eyes, submitting to his caresses with a sort of abandonment. He really did love her, and she had been foolish to doubt it. But it was the being shut out like this from his happy home life, although she had a greater right to be there than any woman in the world, that hurt her so much.

Across the silence she could almost hear Miss Malleson's voice saying: *Viola knows the consequences of disobedience . . .* She rebelled against the hard lesson. What a shame to bring up quite little children in that kind of atmosphere of threatening and punishment and perpetual fear! So bad for them—it haunted them afterward, so that they hardly dared be happy. Even now the uncomfortable sensation produced by those words was capable of clouding her wonderful happiness. She clung suddenly to Esmé's hands.

"Oh, Esmé—I've nobody but you—nothing but you. Please always be kind to me . . ."

"Why, of course, dear child," he said, in some surprise.

They spent all day together, going to little-frequented restaurants for their meals. When evening came Esmé took a hansom and they drove out

to Roehampton, Viola so deeply veiled that even Cecily could not possibly have recognized her. The fresh air did her good, bracing her nerves. With Esmé beside her she wasn't nearly so much afraid of the future. And it would be quite easy to refuse to be left behind when he went to India. She would have her own money when she was married, and she could pay her passage out. Esmé didn't realize yet what a determined, self-willed woman she was . . .

She saw little of him in the days that followed. He seldom stayed in town for even one night, but came up occasionally for the day, and then he never failed to spend an hour or two with her, taking her out to lunch and discussing plans for the wedding. The day was fixed, and everything, he assured her, was now in order. So great was his influence, that Viola had almost forgotten her scruples; and if they thrust themselves forward, as they had a habit of doing at odd moments, she flicked them resolutely away. The only thing in the world that mattered was that she should be Esmé's wife. She loved him more and more, and every time he came it seemed to her that he too loved her with an increased passion.

But sometimes she looked back at the old standard she had deserted, with a wistful, sorrowful look in her eyes. She meant to go back—oh, so humbly, so penitently, afterward. She wasn't a permanent apostate; it was a temporary faithlessness for which she fully meant hereafter to atone. But she never really deceived herself with these resolutions. Why, she might be stricken down with sudden illness or death before she had time to be sorry—to atone! One must live each day, so Miss Malleson had told her, as if in preparation for death. One must be eternally ready because, *Ye know not the day nor the hour* . . .

It seemed like a dream when early one July morn-

ing Esmé came to fetch her. It was not quite eight o'clock, and the summer day had dawned bleak and chill, with a cold rain falling. Viola was quite ready; she knew how much he disliked to be kept waiting. She had risen early, had dressed herself with great care in a new dark brown coat and skirt—the most unbridal-like array imaginable. The skirt was full and fell in folds about her feet, hiding her shoes. She wore a plain brown straw hat trimmed with blue flowers.

She was waiting in the sitting-room when Esmé came in; her almost untouched breakfast lying near her on the table. He was very pale, and his eyes were extraordinarily bright; there was a queer resolute expression about his mouth. She thought that he looked like a man about to embark upon a perilous, hazardous adventure.

"Have you got any tea there, Viola?" he asked. "I should like a cup. Ugh—what a cold morning!" He was beginning to dislike the cold with all the fierce unreasoning antipathy of the Anglo-Indian.

She gave him a cup of tea. "I'm afraid it isn't very hot. Shall I ring for some more?"

"No—there isn't time. This will do perfectly." He drank it quickly, and then said: "Well, we must be off, I suppose. I've got a cab waiting. By the way, we're not going to be married in a church but in a private chapel."

"Will that be all the same?" asked Viola.

"Exactly the same. I've got a special license."

"What—what made you change, Esmé?"

"Safer," he answered, laconically.

Viola said confidently: "No one can separate us now. I don't care who knows!"

Esmé gave her a long, close, strange look. He saw the perfect line of her profile, the long dark brows, the dark eyes, the thick close-growing hair. How beautiful she looked, notwithstanding that ugly

somber dress she was wearing. But she didn't look in the least like a bride. Her loveliness, however, seemed to triumph over the essential gloom of the day, its grayness and darkness.

The cab stopped at last before a tall brick house in what seemed to Viola a totally unfamiliar square. She did not ask any questions because she felt perfectly safe with Esmé. To doubt him would have brought the house of cards falling about her ears. She slipped her hand in his arm and they descended from the cab.

Esmé gave the man his fare, and then rang the bell. The door was immediately opened by a young man.

"Is Mr. Smith here?" inquired Esmé.

"Yes, sir. Just come, sir."

They climbed a flight of stairs, and at the top found themselves on a wide, square landing with corridors branching off in three directions. The place was very silent and deserted, as if the house were uninhabited. Esmé led the way down a passage to the right and entered a room at the far end. It was dimly lit with gas-burners. At the far end there was a raised table covered with a white cloth and with a couple of candlesticks upon it.

Viola had seen few churches other than Catholic ones in her life, and she had never before been into a private chapel belonging to Protestants. It was certainly very bare, but then she imagined such places were always bare. She could remember going as a child to see the private chapel of a great Catholic house, and it had seemed to her more richly decorated, more full of wonderful stained-glass, pictures, and sculpture than any church she had seen in England. The altar had been of sumptuous white marble, inlaid with the rare golden marble that is so scarce and costly. The memory of it flashed before her mind now as she entered this bare, ill-appointed

room. But in her ignorance she accepted it without questioning.

There was no furniture in the room except that table covered with the white cloth, and some chairs and hassocks. She was glad that there was no crucifix—the very sight of one, she felt, would have made her long to rush away. Even as a child that tortured, bleeding Figure of Christ, nailed to the hard wood, had never failed to impress her profoundly, to check her in petty acts of disobedience and rebellion. She could remember running to kiss the Feet of the one in her room at Ardlesham, asking pardon, praying for help. No—to see one now, while she was carrying out the first overt and serious act of rebellion of her life, would have been too sharp a trial.

From another room a young man appeared wearing a surplice. The youth who had opened the door had vanished. They were alone. Esmé made her move toward the table. They stood there side by side. The clergyman opened a book and began to read in a rapid, monotonous voice. He mumbled so much that not a single word reached Viola's ears. "I, Esmé, take thee, Viola, for my wedded wife . . ."

"I, Viola, take thee, Esmé, for my wedded husband . . ."

In sickness and in health . . . till death us do part . . .

She glanced at Esmé. With his flushed cheeks, his brilliant eyes, he looked like a man under the influence of a powerful and exciting drug.

"Sign here, if you please, Mrs. Craye. No—your own name . . . In full, please."

Viola wrote her name in the place indicated, Viola Mary Hudson. But her hand shook so much that the words were trembling and illegible. Esmé had already signed his name—she read it almost mechanically: Esmé Vivian Mansfield Craye. Mans-

field . . . that was why perhaps he had made her call herself by that name. She had wondered sometimes why he had chosen it.

He turned then and took her in his arms.

"Viola—beloved—wife . . ." she heard him whisper.

She was very passive, but she felt almost faint with emotion. Mr. Smith had vanished, and they were quite alone. She could hardly believe that this brief little ceremony which had just taken place could really have joined her life to Esmé's forever, could have made them irrevocably husband and wife. Then a thrill of joy passed through her. Yes, she was Esmé's wife now. Nothing could part them, nothing but sin or death. She was eternally his. Marriage was indissoluble. Whom God hath joined . . . She moved involuntarily away from him and he felt that she shuddered from head to foot. Had God joined them, or had she mocked Him with this ceremony that was forbidden by the laws of her Church?

The lack of formalities had puzzled her a little, but in her ignorance they did not trouble her. She belonged utterly to Esmé now. And some day—very soon—she would go and make peace with her Church . . . The consciousness of sin pressed heavily upon her. It seemed as if she had stretched out her hand to seize and hold an illicit treasure.

"I suppose I'm very happy," she thought, "but it all seems so strange. So untrue. I wish Percival could have been there."

"You must come now, Viola," Esmé gently reminded her.

She took his arm and together they left the room. As in a dream she passed along the thickly carpeted passage with its dull red hangings that looked like somber flames. Then down the long staircase and

out into the street. Rain was still falling, and a bleak cold wind blew in their faces.

"Where are we going?"

"To fetch your luggage. I suppose it's all ready? We shall just have time to catch the train."

"Yes—everything's ready. And where are we going, Esmé?"

"To France," he answered, "to that place on the coast I told you about." He hailed a passing cab and they drove back to Viola's lodgings.

CHAPTER XVI

AT THE station, which was crowded in anticipation of the departure of the boat-train, Esmé was attentive but preoccupied. He had taken Viola to her seat—a corner one in a first-class carriage—and had left her on some pretext of looking after the luggage. Viola was glancing at the papers he had bought, when he suddenly put his head in at the window, and handed her a ticket and some French money.

"Look here, darling, you don't mind traveling down alone, do you? I've met several people I know, and it wouldn't do for them to see us together. It's frightfully important, in fact, that we shouldn't be seen. When you get to Boulogne drive straight to the Hotel de Londres and I'll come on as soon as I possibly can."

Viola started to her feet. "No—no; Esmé—!" she exclaimed, excitedly. "I won't go at all unless you come with me. What does it matter if people see us now? We are married—"

The suggestion had struck her as an almost degrading one. Why should Esmé be ashamed of her? She was his wife. She refused to make such an

ignominious journey, traveling in another carriage while he joined his friends elsewhere. Her pride revolted against the thought of being left thus alone. She attempted to descend, but he gently pushed her backward.

"For Heaven's sake, darling, don't make a scene. I shall be there very soon after you. I've taken our rooms in the name of Mr. and Mrs. Mansfield. It's nonsense to make such a fuss!"

His voice was hard and authoritative. The push, though a gentle one, had not been without decision. And she had promised to obey him. It would be wrong surely to disobey him now, to refuse his very first request.

"Do as you're told and don't be a little fool," he said, sternly.

Viola sank back on the seat. He had seldom spoken to her in that tone before; it reminded her of the day when he had sharply requested her not to laugh so loud in the restaurant, and the effect was exactly as if he had struck her in the face. She felt both shamed and pained. Esmé gave her one quick glance as if to ascertain that she now intended to obey without further discussion, then he turned away and walked hurriedly down the platform.

Viola was alone. She was the only passenger in that compartment. She went to the other side of it, away from the platform, and wiped the indignant tears from her eyes. And then for the first time a queer little misgiving seized her. It was strengthened by the cumulative happenings of that day, beginning with the odd, strange little marriage ceremony in the so-called private chapel of an unknown house in that unfamiliar square. The bare room, the odd look of the young man who had performed the brief ceremony, and then this suddenly disclosed but obviously premeditated plan of Esmé's that she should travel across to France alone while he jour-

neyed independently by the same train and boat. He had done this because of his fear of discovery, but there now seemed to her something actually sinister in his ambiguous, determined secrecy. No motive seemed quite powerful enough to account for it. These thoughts, crowding into her mind like a flock of fierce wild birds, beating against her brain, gave Viola a great longing to get out of the train and drive back to her brother's house. She knew now that she actually mistrusted Esmé, and the knowledge was a hateful one, because only an hour or two ago she had put her life into his hands. But the safety and security, the dull, comfortable monotony of her brother's house, held for her then an invincible attraction. To go back and teach Margery and Lionel the multiplication table was a prospect that had lost all its distastefulness. She thought she knew now exactly how the prodigal felt when he said, "I will arise and go to my Father . . ." Yes, to go back to-day, and make her confession, and find peace once more.

She half rose from her seat. As she did so two ladies entered the compartment, laughing and talking. A porter followed with their bags and holdalls, arranging them on the rack. This operation was scarcely finished when the whistle sounded, there was a slamming of doors, and the long train moved slowly out of the station.

Viola leaned back, turning her face to the window. She was alone except for these two strangers. And she felt that she hated Esmé.

"That was young Craye," observed the younger lady to her companion. "How good-looking he is. But I hear he's a most unsatisfactory son. There's some talk now of his marrying Issie Clethorpe."

"I don't think there's the slightest chance of that. She is far more likely to marry Herringham. He's always down there."

"Craye is such a Prince Charming. And Issie's a romantic little soul!"

"Romance," pronounced the elder lady, authoritatively, "is out of date. Whereas, a large fortune, three beautiful properties, and a six-hundred-year-old name are lasting assets. Issie is fastidious, too—she would hardly put up with such a terrible father-in-law—old Bethnell Green as he's always called!"

Her companion was quite unconvinced. "I know which I should choose," she said, cheerfully. "Esmé Craye is a most fascinating person. Of course he is quite conscienceless, but that only makes him all the more attractive. He is sure to lead his wife a dance whomever he marries, and unless she is blind she will certainly realize that beforehand. I never see him without thinking of that sage old rhyme,

Les yeux verts
Vont a l'enfer . . ."

and she laughed merrily.

Viola listened aghast. But it was all part of this dreadful nightmare into which she had been suddenly plunged. She kept her face averted, gazing at the ugly suburbs of London, the mean, dreadful, monotonous little streets, bleak and poverty-stricken, through which the train was rapidly passing. Presently the buildings gave place to open ground with scattered cottages, then to more definite stretches of fields, green and sodden in the rain, which was still falling heavily. Before long, they came to the Kentish landscape, with its green hop-gardens filled with the tall vines, the quaintly shaped oast-houses, the red-brick villages looking so calm and peaceful, the quiet woods and fields and streams. The rain had ceased now and everything was illuminated with a pale, fragile glimmer of sunshine.

Esmé's face seemed to be watching her. It was

hard and irritable as she had last seen it. "Don't be a little fool!"—those words of his echoed in her ears. She had made him angry by that brief, attempted rebellion. She hoped by the time he joined her in the Boulogne hotel, that he would be in a better temper, softer, more forgiving.

Yes, she was Esmé's wife—that queer little ceremony had linked their lives forever. She was Viola Craye, not Viola Hudson any more. The Honorable Mrs. Esmé Craye—how strange it sounded. She must learn to answer when people addressed her as Mrs. Craye. And soon she would hear no other name. This secrecy couldn't be permitted to continue. Everyone must be told of the marriage—Lord and Lady Bethnell, George and Blanche, Percival and Cecily, Matthew alone in far Ceylon. Blanche would approve; she liked titles even if they were quite new ones. Cecily would say scornfully, "I suppose he was ashamed of the connection and that's why he married you in such a hole-and-corner way. But I've always said the Bethnells were snobs. . . ." Cecily always had a sharp tongue and a malicious word. Still, she would regard Viola with envy because she had married the heir of Ardleshams. Matthew would take no notice at all; perhaps he wouldn't even write to congratulate her. He thought people were mad to marry, and he and Esmé would have nothing at all in common. Matthew was, as she remembered him, and childish impressions are generally pretty correct, a great rough man, careless about his dress, speaking in a loud voice and with a tendency to swear whenever anything annoyed him. Very different from Esmé, smooth, suave, polished, glib of speech, slightly caustic in criticism. But how loving, how dear, when he chose! . . .

She could see the sea now, lying dark and stormy under a gray sky. There was the usual stir of

arrival. A porter came and took charge of her luggage, and Viola, pulling her thick veil over her face, followed him to the steamer. Even she realized now the necessity of traveling apart from Esmé. Her two companions would easily recognize her, and they would remember their conversation in the train and wonder who this woman was who had overheard it all.

She found the cabin booked in Mrs. Mansfield's name and entered it, but she would far rather have spent her time on deck, watching the sea, and the white cliffs and the flying gulls. But she was tired, too, after all the unaccustomed emotions of the morning, and taking off her hat she lay down on the sofa. Presently she felt the steamer move, almost imperceptibly at first, then, as it left the harbor, giving a more pronounced plunge, almost as if it rejoiced to feel the rush of water against its keel. The motion of the boat soothed her, and she fell asleep. She looked very young, scarcely more than a child, as she lay there sleeping. The sudden stopping of the boat in Boulogne harbor aroused her.

Someone took her hand-luggage and carried it to the upper deck. Then a French porter in a blue blouse seized it and she followed him across the gangway to the customs. She did not dare look about to find Esmé. She felt that he would be angry if she recognized him. And it would be difficult, nay impossible, to look at him with a blank stare as if he had been a stranger.

She waited till an official came round. He did not ask her to open her bag, but marked it with a piece of chalk. Then she had to go through the same process with her trunks. Soon she was in a *fiacre* driving to the hotel Esmé had named. She wondered how long she would have to wait for him.

The wind had risen since the morning and the sea was getting very rough. She could hear it thunder-

ing on the shore with a loud, fierce rhythmic sound. She was glad they had been able to cross early before the sudden storm arose.

She waited for more than half an hour, and then as Esmé did not come she lunched alone. Perhaps he had met some friends and gone to lunch with them. In his anxiety to preserve the strictest secrecy, he seemed to have lost all consideration for his bride. She felt lonely and miserable. What could have kept him?

The food revived her, for she was very hungry, having had little that morning except an early cup of tea before the marriage ceremony. What a long time ago it seemed, almost as if it had happened in another life rather than only that very morning. When she had finished her luncheon she went up to her room to wait for Esmé. The afternoon wore on. Every moment the wind increased in violence, rattling the fragile casements and blowing gusts of rain against them. By night there would be perhaps a terrible storm.

It was not till much later that Viola guessed what had really happened. To ensure secrecy Esmé must have remained behind in London till a later train. He would cross perhaps by the evening boat. He had not dared risk traveling with his wife, so afraid was he of being seen and recognized. When she first realized this, Viola felt almost sick with apprehension. Because he had waited he would have to cross in this terrible storm. Perhaps there might be danger . . . She trembled at the thought. She sat there, a prey to nervous fears. Longing for Esmé, and yet dreading that moment of his arrival.

She lay down for a time on the sofa in the sitting-room and slept fitfully. When she awoke, a premature dusk had fallen over the world. Black clouds veiled the sky, and the sea was dark and heaving and patterned with great white bars of foam that looked

like scars. It was awful and menacing, and she trembled to think that Esmé might be on it now.

It was impossible to remain there idle, so she rose and began to unpack her things, arranging them neatly in the drawers and cupboards. But she felt very tired and lonely, and sometimes it seemed to her that the inevitable punishment had already begun to fall upon her. She had sacrificed her peace of mind to grasp this happiness, and joy had fled from her, like a timid thing she could not hold.

At last she heard a little stir in the passage, there was a knock at the door, and Esmé came into the sitting-room, followed by a man with his luggage. He looked very pale and ill from the effects of his tempestuous journey across the Channel. When they were alone he asked for some brandy and Viola gave him some. He threw himself upon the sofa and fell into a profound slumber. From time to time he moaned a little. In the flickering gas-light his face was livid and ghastly.

Viola felt she should never forget those hours of unquiet torment, here alone with Esmé in a foreign hotel, the storm shrieking outside, and the rain and wind dashing against the ill-fitting casements. She hardly dared move for fear of disturbing Esmé, but sat there, chilled and stiff, a prey to the most harassing thoughts and fears. Sometimes she even felt that it could not be true—this was only a nightmare from which she would surely soon awaken. She looked back with envy upon the Viola Hudson who had rebelled against her quiet, monotonous life in South Kensington. She envied her her peace of mind, her state of grace. This thought, coming suddenly, stabbed her to fierce suffering. Would she ever know again what it was to be in the state of grace, she who had wilfully sinned and disobeyed and rebelled, and had cut herself off from her Church by to-day's unscrupulous action? She longed for Esmé

to awake and comfort her, but he slept on, oblivious of her suffering. The brandy he had taken had stupefied him. He slept and slept as if he had been drugged.

At last she rang the bell and gave an order for some dinner to the waiter. When it came she tried to rouse Esmé. "Dinner's here—wouldn't you like some?" she said. Her voice was clear and controlled, and it penetrated across his dazed senses, for his answer showed that he had both heard and understood.

"No, no; I don't want any. Leave me alone . . ."

Viola swallowed some food with difficulty. All the time the wind was clamoring against the house as if it would demolish it. The eerie cry of the storm alarmed her; it possessed a wailing, human sound, as if it were echoing the shrieks of suffering men out there on the waste of waters. But Esmé slept on undisturbed.

Viola left him at last and went into her bedroom. She rightly judged that he would sleep on till morning.

CHAPTER XVII

ESMÉ was quite ill for several days after their arrival; the crossing had thoroughly upset him and had also brought on a touch of malaria, from which he had previously suffered in India. Viola was completely occupied in nursing him. She had no experience of nursing, and had also that natural alarm of illness so often observable in the perfectly healthy. But she was assiduous in her attentions and seldom left him for long together. His attitude, however, puzzled her. He was nearly always highly irritable when she approached him, and his curiously uncertain temper manifested itself on every possible

occasion. The truth was, he was never a good patient when ill; but Viola, not realizing this, blamed herself, and wept secretly when she went to bed at night. She believed that he had ceased to love her.

Sometimes she went out of his room with the tears stinging her eyes.

"I'm being punished," she thought; "he doesn't love me. I've lost that too." The thought was unbearable. Had she bartered so much to find herself only bereft, in return, of all those things she had confidently hoped to win? Her own love made her an abject little slave, meek, submissive, humble, not realizing that her very fear of displeasing him acted like a powerful irritant upon his highly sensitive nerves.

In consequence of his illness they remained in Boulogne. Things certainly improved when he was better and able to go out again. But she saw that he was ill-at-ease; he had the look sometimes of a guilty man who dreads discovery, and imagines detection in every face he sees. His secret marriage had brought him an increase of suffering; perhaps he too was beginning to think that it hadn't, after all, been worth the candle.

One evening when they were walking on the *plage* together, she said to him: "Esmé, don't you think you'd better write and tell your people, while we're here? You know we can't stay in Boulogne forever, and they must know sooner or later." She put her hand on his arm. It was getting late, and the place was almost deserted. "Do!" she urged, gaining courage from his silence. "You'll never be happy until you've told them."

"Oh, it's much too soon," he answered, trying to speak lightly. "It'll be quite time enough to do it when we go back to England."

"You see," she continued, "I can't keep on making

Percival and Cecily believe that I'm still in Venice. Why, it's more than a month since I left the convent. They'll be getting suspicious at not hearing from me. And I must tell Percival because then he will give me the money I have a right to when I marry."

"Darling child, I'll give you all the money you want. And you can tell your brother—directly I've told my father." The old uneasy look came into his face.

"It must be soon, then," said Viola, firmly.

"That's for me to decide," said Esmé, a little curtly.

Viola began to believe that he was one of those weak, vacillating characters who have to be urged and pushed forward, and encouraged to take difficult steps. She had no idea of the iron, unbendable quality of her husband's will. That was one of several unpleasant surprises that lay in store for her.

Always, when looking back upon those weeks spent with Esmé in Boulogne, she could see how very far from happiness she had been. She could not have believed that he could be so little tender, so apparently uncaring. Fear of discovery was an obsession with him, and he seemed in consequence unable to derive the slightest pleasure from her companionship. Perhaps it was true that a bad son makes a bad husband. And she had always been perfectly aware of his invincible egoism; it had seemed to her the one blot on his perfection. Now it actually raised a cruel barrier between them. Esmé refused to look at things from her point of view; he regarded it indeed as merely negligible.

One day he received an unusually large batch of letters forwarded from his club. His valet, who was partially in the secret, had been told to call for the letters and forward them. He knew that his master was abroad on private business, and perhaps he guessed its nature. Esmé had completely covered

up his tracks except from this one person, who had a singular and doglike devotion to him, and would certainly have died rather than betray him. Accustomed to his master's caprice and violence, he would not have exchanged it for any other form of servitude.

Among the letters Viola noticed a long official envelope. Esmé put it aside, to be dealt with last of all. He had a strange way of tearing up all his letters the moment he had read them. And he read them so perfunctorily she could not believe that he had had time to grasp their contents.

All the other letters having been disposed of after this fashion, Esmé took up the long envelope bearing the printed words, *On Her Majesty's Service*. He opened it, read its contents, and threw it on the table with a gesture of disgust.

"I'm recalled—" he said briefly. "My regiment's ordered up to the frontier."

Viola felt her heart sink, and a deadly chill crept over her whole body. For the first time in her life she was frightened—so frightened that she could have screamed with terror. She saw Esmé leaving her, going away from her, perhaps forever. Recalled . . . ordered up to the frontier . . . She realized for the first time, that he was a soldier and might have to pay a soldier's debt. She went across to him and kneeling beside him put her arms about him. He stooped and leaned his cheek against hers.

Through their brief married life he had never seemed to her so near, so dear, so essentially her own as he did then.

"Esmé—I can't bear it," she whispered.

There was a long silence. They remained thus close to each other, clasping each other. Viola said at last:

"We must go back to Ardlesham. We ought to

leave this afternoon. We mustn't waste any time, Esmé."

He released himself and rose to his feet. "Oh, it's impossible for you to come to Ardlesham with me. I shall just run down and say good-by to them, of course. They'll be awfully upset. But I couldn't take you—that's out of the question."

Viola rose unsteadily to her feet. "You *must* take me, Esmé. I insist upon it. I've a right to go." She stood there in front of him, proudly, like a young queen.

"Nonsense—you must do just as you're told," he answered.

"But, Esmé, if I don't go with you, where *am* I to go? What am I to do?"

"You must make your own plans. Perhaps you'd better go back to your brother's. Carry on—it won't be for very long—till I can come home again."

"Esmé—"

"Oh, don't worry me, darling. As if this wasn't enough!"

He sat down at the table and began to write rapidly. Viola sank into a chair. She was weeping silently. He was going into danger, perhaps never to return. And it was obviously his intention not to acknowledge her before he went away. He was going off, just as he had always done as a boy, leaving her to face her punishment alone. A little curious perhaps and interested, but without any pity. "Oh, did you catch it?" he would say carelessly afterward. "Rotten luck!"

Rotten luck . . . But it had been her own fault. She had followed blindly when he beckoned. She loved him, desperately, unwisely, to her soul's hurt. "I am being punished," she thought, again.

"Oh, don't *blub*, Viola!" he burst out, unable to restrain his impatience. He shivered as he spoke.

Viola hastily dried her tears.

"You can be frightfully depressing. And I always thought you had such a cheerful nature!"

"Well, you mustn't blame me if I don't feel exactly cheerful to-day," she answered, with some show of spirit.

"You're always at me to do the one thing you know is quite impossible," he continued, fretfully. "I've told you hundreds of times that I can't tell my father I've married you. You knew I should have to keep it from him—I never tried to hide that from you."

She was silent. Yes, he had never deceived her on this point. She had trusted too much to her own influence after marriage.

"I'll give you enough to live upon. It won't be very much, but you must try to make it do. And you must arrange your own life for these next few months. Perhaps you'd like to go back to Venice? Those women were decent to you, weren't they? You'd be all right there."

She looked at him strangely, rather as if she were scrutinizing a stranger, coldly and critically. For he was a stranger, this hard, unloving Esmé.

"No; I shan't go back to Venice. I shall go to Percival and tell him the whole story, and ask his advice. He's very easy-going as a rule, but he's a lawyer—he can help me. Perhaps he will write to your father."

Esmé looked at her with hard, frosty eyes.

"Oh, so you mean to go back on me?" he said.

"You leave me no choice."

All the time she was thinking: "He counted on my not crying out. But he'll find he's made a mistake." She was dimly aware that the consequences of her disobedience would be far-reaching. Not just a transitory penalty such as she had suffered at Miss Malleson's hands.

He got up and came close to her, putting his arms

about her and kissing her with the old passionate tenderness. "Darling, we mustn't quarrel now. We've so few hours left to spend together. Perhaps we ought never to have married, but since we are married it's our duty to help and comfort each other. And we must stand by each other, Viola. As my wife you owe me complete, unquestioning loyalty. If you tell your brother that you're married you must give your husband's name as Rowland Mansfield. You must always call yourself Mrs. Mansfield. That will be quite enough to satisfy Percival. Will you promise, Viola?"

"I can't promise, because one never knows what may happen. But I really will do my best, Esmé."

When he was in this mood of bewildering tenderness she felt that she could trust him completely. It chased away all her ugly little doubts and fears.

"It's so very important that nothing should be known," he said.

"Yes," she agreed.

"We must leave for London by the afternoon boat. I think we shall be safe traveling at the same time as long as we don't stick together."

"Yes, Esmé."

"You'd better go and do your packing." He kissed her again, satisfied that she was once more soothed into a quiet submissive mood.

She went out of the room, forcing back her tears. It would never do to disfigure her face by crying now. Afterward there would be days, weeks, months, perhaps years wherein she could cry undisturbed. But this was a moment for calm and courage. The sudden separation would hurt him too. He really loved her. All that surface irritation signified nothing but a preoccupation, an anxiety about the future. She must be careful not to annoy him now by any manifestation of emotion.

The trivial activity of packing distracted her.

She packed Esmé's things as well as her own. It would be a relief to him when he came in to find that she had already accomplished that odious but necessary task.

"We'd better go down to lunch," he said, suddenly appearing.

"Yes. I'm just ready. Everything's finished." She looked up smiling, her face a little flushed, for the August day was sultry.

"Splendid! What a wife you are, Viola! I don't know how I shall get along without you."

"I wish you hadn't to get along without me. When I'm so ready to come to the ends of the earth. . . ."

His eyes were very bright as they rested upon her young, perfect loveliness. It wouldn't be so easy to leave her behind, after all. He would want her. She was all grace and charm.

"Oh, my darling, my darling," he murmured.

She was touched by the rare words of praise; they made her feel ready to die for Esmé. They went downstairs together. Viola's eyes were still bright from those unshed tears.

It was only a few weeks since their wedding-day and already their separation was imminent. Although Esmé had once or twice alluded to the prospect of a frontier campaign, she had refused to allow her thoughts to dwell upon it. And she had not really believed—she still found it impossible to believe—that he meant to leave her behind when he went back to India. Something would happen—he would blurt out the truth to his father—and surely in such a moment of approaching peril the old man could not but proffer forgiveness. Surely they would receive her, welcome her, because Esmé loved her and had made her his wife. She confidently believed that this nebulous something would intervene and make everything clear and open and

unambiguous. She would not face the unpalatable truth that all through these days of their marriage her hold upon Esmé had been visibly slackening. His love had spent itself. And while it surely diminished, his fear of discovery increased by leaps and bounds. He had not the slightest intention of risking a quarrel with his parents by revealing this imprudent marriage. His instinct was to wait, to mark time, to trust to chance.

She took her seat opposite to him at the little table. And as she looked at him, calmly eating his food, a cold sickly feeling took possession of her. It was as if for the first time she was able to measure him accurately, unbiassed by his passing mood of tenderness, and by the kisses with which he had tried to soothe her. He intended to leave her behind, unacknowledged. His one thought was to protect, to safeguard himself. His face so beautiful, possessing for her an eternal attraction, was hard, cold, and insensitive. Many a Greek marble had more soul in its carven face than Esmé Craye possessed in his flesh and blood one.

Suddenly she leaned back in her chair and closed her eyes. She was faint with a definite physical fear. Esmé's face was hidden now behind a black mist that descended upon it like a curtain. A sound as of pitiless roaring engines deafened her. . . .

The next thing she knew was a cool rush of water flowing over her face and hair, trickling down her neck into the collar of her dress. Esmé's voice was saying: "There, are you better?"

She looked up. She was lying on a sofa outside in the vestibule, and Esmé's face, with real anxiety and concern in it, was bending above her.

"I can't think what came over me. . . ." she murmured.

"Have you ever fainted before?"

"No . . . it feels like dying. . . ."

"Dying!" repeated Esmé, with something of horror in his voice.

Viola closed her eyes again. She felt mortally tired, as if the brief fit of unconsciousness had exhausted her. Perhaps her soul had traveled many, many miles while her body lay thus unconscious, and had grown weary.

"I wonder what on earth made you faint!" Mingled with his anxiety there was a note of acute irritation. But she felt too weak to care.

"Of course, if you're not fit to travel to-day you must follow to-morrow," he added.

Even across her still dazed senses the selfishness of the suggestion sickened her.

"Oh, it's nothing," she said. "I expect I got tired stooping over the boxes. And then this sudden news. . . ." She tried to smile.

His expression was still hideously perturbed.

"My darling child, you gave me no end of a fright."

He told a passing waiter to bring some brandy, and poured a little of the fiery liquid down her throat. The unaccustomed stimulant acted like magic, bringing back the color to her cheeks.

"That's better. We shall have to start for the boat soon. Do you think you feel well enough?"

She struggled to her feet. If she died in the effort, she resolved that she would not be left alone in Boulogne that day. She would travel home by the same boat and train as Esmé, whatever happened.

"Oh, yes, I couldn't be left behind," she assured him.

Would he really have seized upon this excuse to make the journey alone, glad to escape the chance of stray detection?

They drove down to the quay together, and as the train from Paris had not yet arrived he accompanied

her on board the steamer and saw her safely ensconced in a deck cabin. He placed her bag on the little table and put a flask of brandy near her.

"I think it's going to be calm. But if you feel at all queer take some of that," he said. He looked at her questioningly. She was flushed and feverish now, and excited, as people who have recently fainted so often are. She put out her hand.

"Oh, do stay with me, Esmé. These are our last hours together."

"Oh, don't be sentimental!" he cried, in an exasperated tone.

He went out, slamming the door.

CHAPTER XVIII

AT FOLKESTONE Esmé did not approach Viola, and she saw him in the distance leaving the boat with a party of men. He did not attempt to join her, and she had to make her way to the train alone, feeling exhausted and a little dizzy from the motion of the steamer.

She supposed that he would speak to her at Charing Cross and tell her what they were going to do. She was ready to fall in with any suggestion he might make. She felt too ill to form plans for herself.

The London platform was almost clear of people when Esmé suddenly appeared.

"Have you settled what you're going to do?" he asked.

Esmé—"you won't leave me to-day?" she cried, aghast.

He frowned. "I thought you understood. I'm going down to Ardlesham to-night. I must break the news to them about my going back. To-morrow I shall have to come up to the War Office, and I'll meet you somewhere if you like."

Her heart sank. She put out both hands in entreaty. "Oh, don't leave me like that! Esmé—I can't bear it." She could have flung herself on her knees upon the grimy platform, there at his feet.

"Don't make a scene. Come—get into this cab. You'll go to your brother's, I suppose?"

He held open the door of a moldy looking four-wheeler. She saw that her box had already been hoisted upon it. Viola hesitated.

"Get in!" Esmé's voice commanded impatiently. She groped her way in.

"I'll wire to you about our meeting. If not tomorrow, the day after. You'd better give me the address."

She scribbled it on a piece of paper, and gave it to him.

"It'll be safe if I wire, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes," wearily, "I should think they're all out of town still."

"Well, my advice to you is to go to bed as soon as you can and get a good long rest."

"Very well, Esmé." Her lips were white.

He put his foot on the step and leaning toward her kissed her.

"You must be brave," he said. "It's a difficult moment for us both. But you always had heaps of pluck. Good-by, darling—we shall soon meet. Try to keep cheerful . . ." His eyes rested upon her face and suddenly his expression softened. He kissed her again.

When the cab drove away, Viola leaned back and burst into tears. All this time she had not cried, she had repressed her tears, for fear of annoying Esmé, and leaving an impression of damp sentimentality upon him. Men hated tears—she had been brought up on that tradition—and Esmé had always been annoyed if she had shown the slightest disposition to cry. But now that he was no longer there

to see and be annoyed, her tears flowed freely and unchecked. Mingled with the pain of separation, there was the wound to her pride. She felt there was something so ignominious about this homecoming. A bride returning alone from her wedding-trip while her husband went home to visit his parents! She longed, for one desperate moment, to follow him down to Ardlesham, to insist upon revealing the truth to Lady Bethnell. But the mad impulse passed. Esmé would certainly never forgive her, and she was not nearly so sure of his love now as she had been before their marriage.

Before her, too, lay the disagreeable prospect of telling Percival about her marriage—this clandestine marriage of which she was only permitted to reveal so little. And it wouldn't be easy to deceive him. Through all his cheery surface good-nature he was a very able man of law. He would ask her questions, close, direct questions. He wouldn't be satisfied with evasive answers. She was, however, determined to obey Esmé and suppress the name of the man she had married. From henceforth she was to be Mrs. Rowland Mansfield.

And if she obeyed Esmé implicitly, surely that would win him. He loved a prompt cheerful compliance with his most exacting demands. Then he would display in return a sunny good-humor that signified approval.

She was afraid she hadn't been very cheerful that day. But the suddenness of the news had overwhelmed her. They had had to part at a few hours' notice, and soon he would go away altogether and it might be many months before she could see him again. The thought of those months alarmed and disquieted her. She saw them like long black intervals, filled to the brim with anxiety, with terrors of all kinds. She was sorry she had fainted like that—she wondered why it had happened. She had

never fainted before, even that day when she fell from the cedar-tree and cut her head and arm.

The cab stopped before Percival's house, and Viola descended and hurried up the steps. The door was opened by Rebecca, the maid who had once been in Miss Malleson's service and had known her since she was a child. The sight of Rebecca's thin, grim, unlovely visage filled Viola with a definite sense of comfort and well-being.

"Oh, Rebecca—I've come back!" she said, and kissed her, just as she had done as a little child.

The practical Rebecca descended the steps and gave orders to the cabman about the trunk. He deposited it in the hall and she gave him his fare. When the door was shut, Viola turned to her eagerly.

"Is Mrs. Hudson here?"

"No, Miss Viola. They're all down at Dawlish. They won't be back for about a month."

"And my brother?"

"He was here last week for a night, but he said he shouldn't be up again just yet."

Viola felt at once relieved and disappointed. The moment of disclosure was thus automatically postponed, and many things might happen before the month came to an end. She was too tired now, to cope with any more problems.

"Would you get my room ready, please, Rebecca? I shall want to go to bed soon. I haven't been very well."

Rebecca threw open the door of the study where Viola had lain on the sofa reading novels that foggy day last January.

"I'll bring you some tea, miss. The water's on the boil. Jinny and I were just going to have a cup."

Rebecca disappeared to the kitchen regions. Viola sank into a chair. She was too tired to cry, too tired almost to feel. But this home-coming was

terrible. Even Cecily with her acid tongue would have been preferable to this loneliness.

Rebecca returned very soon with the tea-tray. She noticed that Viola was looking very white and she opened the window. A faint breath of sultry August air stole as if reluctantly into the room.

"You do look bad, miss," she observed. "Have you been ill?"

Viola was popular with all the servants, because she gave few orders and no trouble. But by Rebecca she was respectfully worshiped, and once or twice Viola had wondered if Esmé would let her engage her as her own maid.

"Oh, no. But I'm tired after my journey."

"You've just come from abroad, miss?"

"Yes."

She drank the tea; it was strong and aromatic and very hot. The stimulant revived her. Rebecca left her alone and went upstairs to get her room ready. This process was not completed before Viola herself appeared. She had climbed the flights of narrow London stairs with flagging footsteps.

"I think I'll have a bath," she said.

"Shall I turn the water on now, miss?"

"Yes, please."

The bathroom was on the same floor. Viola felt refreshed by the soothing contact of the hot water. She was already feeling better by the time she got into bed. From the mingled effects of fatigue, exhaustion and grief, she quickly fell asleep.

"Miss Viola looks ill," Rebecca remarked to the "tweeny," as they repaired to the kitchen to consider the question of dinner, the cook being still away on her holiday. "I've never seen her look like that before," she added.

The tweeny, who was a cockney with all the precocious intelligence of her race, giggled. "Did you see 'er 'and?" she inquired.

"No, I didn't. What was the matter with it?" asked Rebecca, vaguely annoyed by something in Jinny's manner. She was an old servant, punctiliously loyal, and there was a hint of rebuke in her tone as if she would not permit underlings to comment upon the family.

"She 'ad on a wedding-ring," giggled the tweeny, putting her hand over her mouth as if to restrain a louder guffaw.

"Nonsense!" said Rebecca, obviously startled.

"Well, you jes' look for yerself, then," said Jinny. She giggled again, and her fat face was pink with enjoyment. The situation was delightfully mysterious and certainly called for explanation.

"I really don't know what you're talking about, Jinny," said Rebecca, loftily, "but it strikes me that you see too much with those little pigs' eyes of yours." She delivered the insult with emphasis, and Jinny's face grew pink again from an entirely different emotion. "You'd better go on with your scrubbing and see to your dirty dishes and learn not to talk so much. You'll have something going wrong with your tongue one of these days if you let it run away with you like this. Wedding-ring, indeed!"

Jinny pouted. "Well, yer can see it for yerself," she said. Rebecca might scold and rebuke her, but she was determined to stick to her point. She had seen the wedding-ring with her own eyes, and she was convinced that Miss Viola had got married, secretly and on the sly, while she was away.

Rebecca, despite her reproofs, felt exceedingly uncomfortable. Jinny could hardly have invented such a thing as that. She must remember to look at Miss Viola's hands when she took her up her dinner.

Her rebuke still rankled in Jinny's mind. She resolved to have the last word.

"There is sech things as weddings, Miss Rebecca, even though they don't 'appen to have come *your* way," she said, with a wicked little grin, and a furtive glance from the pigs' eyes.

Rebecca tossed her head, and went out of the kitchen. Really, the girl's cheek was insufferable. How Mrs. Hudson could keep her! Some day she meant to tell her what a sly artful little creature Jinny was.

It was dark when Rebecca knocked again at Viola's door, and she knocked twice without receiving any answer. Then she opened the door, switched on the electric light, and deposited her tray on the table. Having done this she stood beside the bed and deliberately contemplated Viola, with the privileged intimacy of the old trusted servant.

Viola's dark hair was all loosened, and spread over the pillow like a soft shadowy cloud. She was very pale, and there were traces of tears on her face. One hand was stretched out and upon the third finger of it glimmered a little gold ring. The sight of that ring seemed to hypnotize Rebecca; she stood there, gazing at the pale hand with its significant symbol. Then Viola awoke, and their eyes met.

She said quite simply: "Yes, I'm married, Rebecca. I haven't told anyone yet. My name is . . . Mrs. Mansfield." She hesitated as she pronounced it.

"I'm very glad to hear you're married, ma'am. I hope you'll be very happy."

"Thank you, Rebecca."

"I hope the gentleman's a good Catholic, ma'am?"

"No. I'm afraid he isn't. You must pray for him."

"Yes, ma'am. But I'm sorry he's not a Catholic. Miss Malleson would have been grieved to think you'd married a Protestant."

"Yes, Rebecca, I know she would. But one can't always help these things."

"No, ma'am. I suppose not." Rebecca's voice was all respect. "I hope you're feeling better, ma'am, and that you'll be able to eat some dinner." She moved toward the door.

"Oh, there's nothing the matter with me. I only want a good night's sleep."

Yet, was it true that there was nothing the matter with her? Her heart was broken with grief, and there had come a shadow between her soul and Almighty God. The shadow of her own sin of disobedience. She would have to expiate that sin. She couldn't escape. As she lay there, she shivered violently from head to foot. It seemed to her almost that life was ebbing from her.

She rang the bell sharply, and Rebecca came running back into her room in hot haste.

"Oh, whatever's the matter, ma'am? Are you feeling ill?"

"No—no—Rebecca—but I'm frightened! Don't go away."

She clung to Rebecca's gnarled work-worn hand, and still holding it clutched tightly in her own she fell into an uneasy sleep.

"If she's not better in the morning I must send for the doctor," thought Rebecca.

She looked down at the hand upon which the wedding-ring hung so loosely. Who was this man she had married, and why had he let her return home alone?

CHAPTER XIX

SINCE Rebecca's fixed, interrogative gaze had surprised her into a confession, Viola resolved to lose no time in writing to Percival to inform him of her marriage. By the same post she sent a note

addressed to Esmé at his club. He would find it if he came to London that day, and thus even if he had not time to come and see her, he would at least receive news of her and learn that she was better. Indeed on the morning following her arrival Viola awoke feeling wonderfully refreshed. She sprang out of bed, and looked out of the window. In that narrow strip of pale London sky there was a hint of deep clear blue. It was going to be a lovely day. It would perhaps bring Esmé. They would be happy together; she wouldn't worry him with her own anxieties about the future.

But although she waited in all that day, he did not come, nor did she receive telegram or message from him. Naturally he would be very busy. He would have a certain amount of kit to get; he must call at the War Office; he must prepare for his long voyage. Still, she was disappointed, and by evening all her gay spirits had evaporated. She waited up till nearly eleven o'clock, hoping that he might come. She had told him she was alone in the house except for the servants, and that therefore he could come without danger. She could count on Rebecca's silence and loyalty. It would be delicious to receive Esmé here, as it were in her own home.

On the following morning his letter arrived. He would come to see her on Saturday. And to-day was only Thursday. She had still two whole days to wait, before that so-desired meeting. Instinct told her that it would be a momentous one, influencing their future lives to an unimaginable, almost unparalleled, extent. Even while she looked forward to seeing him again, to hearing those words of recovered tenderness he was bound to offer, there was something within her that feared it. He had seen his parents; he knew exactly how he stood in their regard, and if he had made any tentative efforts to reveal the truth, she would have to know that too.

Through those two days Viola was a prey to fears, to misgivings.

On Friday morning Percival's answer reached her. Although it was brief she could read between the lines, and could note his unexpressed dissatisfaction, the points which offered food for anxiety to his legal mind. "There is always a great danger about a secret marriage," he wrote, "especially when one of the parties is as young and inexperienced as yourself. You are not even of age. Men have sometimes pretended to go through a ceremony of marriage in order to obtain possession of a woman, knowing all the time that it was in no way binding and wholly void in law. It would be very difficult for you to be certain that all the necessary conditions had been fulfilled. It is strange, too, that you should have returned home alone. What excuse did this Mansfield make for leaving you so soon after the wedding? It is a most anomalous position for you, and the whole thing points to a strong motive for secrecy which has its sinister aspect. If you find yourself in any difficulty wire for me and I will come at once. Cecily sends her love. I think she is hurt that you did not confide in her. We are both astonished that you did not insist upon being married in a Catholic church. I have always admired the way in which your Church safeguards marriage . . ."

There was another letter from Esmé by the same post, written at Ardlesham but bearing a London post-mark. "I shall come at twelve on Saturday. As you are alone I shall come to the house as you suggest and perhaps you will give me lunch. I'm up to the eyes in the tiresomest business. My father is in a very queer mood, one might almost think he suspects something. I stayed away too long, it seems, and wrote too seldom. And 'what the devil was I doing in France at all?' You can fill in the

picture, a very pleasant one and typical of British domestic harmony. Keep all your smiles for me, darling, I shall need them. By the way, there is much gossip about Isolde Clethorpe and Herringham. To save my face I dined at Riversedge last night. I don't wish to be conceited, but I think she prefers me to the portly and opulent Herringham."

Well, when Esmé came he would necessarily have to see Percival's letter. He must realize for himself that this secret business had aroused the suspicions of an eminent barrister who had matrimonial law at his fingers' ends. Esmé would have to learn that she couldn't go on being secret and mysterious. Everyone must hear the truth, that she was married, that she was his wife. If necessary he must face poverty for her sake. He couldn't leave her alone to suffer, like an abandoned, deserted woman. He must make their marriage public. And suddenly she realized, with a sense of acute relief, that she had an efficient prop in Percival. He was indolent and easy-going in his own home, good-humored, blunt of speech, too fond of his food, but once his legal interest was aroused no one could possibly be more astute, practical, and industrious. If Esmé continued obstinate, she would insist upon a meeting between the two men. She remembered the astonished and significantly inquisitive expression upon Rebecca's face as she allowed her eyes to rest upon that tell-tale ring. It had forced from her the simple confession: "Yes—I'm married, Rebecca." She was glad to be able to say those words. For there would inevitably be talk among the servants—the critical discussions one didn't mind when everything was smooth and straightforward. But any suggestion of secrecy was bound to give rise to gossip, lending too, a disagreeable edge to it, piquing curiosity, and prompting suppositions that were not

always kind. Viola, sensitive and thin-skinned still from lack of contact with the world, which is such an excellent hardener of skins, writhed at the thought of misunderstanding and misconception. Percival's letter, kind though it was, had bruised her. She began to see what the world would say when it learned of her marriage. And she could not be tied to silence—she must speak, she must defend herself, her own action.

Even Percival, who troubled himself so little about religion, had expressed his astonishment that she should have foregone a Catholic marriage ceremony. There was a touch of sternness in the letter, which she had never before associated with this easy-going brother. He would certainly be a match for Esmé. He would force him to speak. She was glad to think she would have Percival so strongly on her side. . . .

It was nearly one o'clock on Saturday morning before Rebecca opened the drawing-room door and announced "Mr. Mansfield." Viola was sitting, waiting for him; all through the past hour she had shown signs of an almost unbearable restlessness. He was so late that she had begun to fear he didn't intend to come, after all. He would put her off with another excuse. It was such a relief to see him, that she ran forward, eagerly, breathlessly, and flung her arms about his neck, crying, "Esmé! Esmé" . . .

She had worked hard, during those three days, to get the room ready with Rebecca's help. Cecily always left everything covered up with newspapers and the furniture swathed in brown holland. And Viola was unable to endure the prospect of greeting Esmé in a room where the mirrors and pictures presented ghostly newspaper-covered shapes. She had made it all look as pretty as she could, changing something of Cecily's stiffness of arrangement, and heaping up the place with fresh-cut flowers.

Esmé took her by the shoulders, gazed into her face with his tender whimsical look, and then kissed her lightly. As always, he was struck afresh by her beauty—it seemed to him more wonderful at every new meeting. If only things could be straightened out and he could claim her openly as his wife! . . .

“Darling,” he murmured.

“Lunch will be ready very soon,” said Viola, presently. “We won’t talk about anything till after we’ve had it.”

It was a short meal, as perfect as Rebecca and the tweeny could manage without professional aid. Esmé praised the food, and ate and drank heartily. Viola’s smiling face opposite reassured him. She was beginning perhaps to settle down, to realize how important it was to keep everything perfectly quiet till a more auspicious day should dawn. He was therefore ill-prepared for the unpleasant surprise of Percival’s letter, when they found themselves once more in the drawing-room.

“I’ve had a letter from Percival, and I want you to read what he says,” she began, laying the open sheet of paper before him.

“Viola dearest—I’m sick to death of talking things over. Do, for goodness’ sake, give me a holiday from it to-day.”

He leaned back, crossed his legs, and lit a cigarette, looking at her lazily through the little mist of smoke.

Her lips closed firmly, and all at once her face became hard and resolute.

“It’s got to be done. Don’t let’s shirk it,” she said.

Esmé’s nerves were on edge. It was tactless, he felt, for her to press him like this. She was going to be tiresome then! Well, if she meant to ask for trouble, he was ready to give it to her with both hands! He steeled himself against the slowly-

growing fascination she was always able to exercise over him. With that force of purity and goodness and high resolve in his life, what a different man he might become. And he would love her always—love her till death. . . .

"When you've read the letter you'll see how impossible it is that I should continue to keep your name out of it. Percival is a lawyer and he isn't easily satisfied. And in a sense, though not of course legally, he is my guardian."

Esmé glanced at the letter and flung it on the table.

"My darling child, you can't possibly expect me to read all that palaver!"

"You must read it, please, Esmé. You must see exactly how I stand—what he says about my position."

"Why on earth did you tell him that you were married at all?"

"I was obliged to tell him, so that he may give me my money."

Esmé disliked law and lawyers. His experience of them had not been smooth or pleasant. He knew their detestable habit of detecting a weak spot. What a pity Percival belonged to that disagreeable tribe! He took up the letter again, read it attentively, and for the second time flung it away.

"He seems as suspicious as most lawyers," he said, angrily.

Viola sat there, looking very white and stern, her hands folded in her lap.

"I mean to put myself in his hands. To do just as he advises," she said.

"Nonsense, you're going to do nothing of the kind. You aren't beginning to funk, are you? You never used to funk!"

"I didn't find Percival's letter very reassuring," she said, coldly.

"Don't talk like that, my darling. You owe me all your loyalty now. Leave this odious brother of yours alone. Why, I thought you hated the whole lot of them!"

"I have never hated Percival."

Remembering scenes of a similar character in Boulogne and even before, Esmé tried to cajole her, to kiss her back into a state of due subjection. But somehow he didn't like this suggestion of interference from the man of law. The letter, stern, a little reproachful, seemed to show plainly that Percival was prepared to come to his sister's aid should difficulties arise. And it would be aid of an efficient, highly technical character. This entirely altered the aspect of affairs. Viola was not of age, and this man had certain rights. He was also apparently her trustee. These complications alarmed Esmé. It was most important that no rumor of the affair should reach Lord Bethnell's ears. His mother had at last prevailed upon his father to settle an adequate sum upon him. Lord Bethnell made it contingent upon his son's not marrying without parental approval. Lady Bethnell had done her best to obtain it unconditionally, but the old man was obdurate. The hoped-for marriage with Miss Clethorpe had fallen through, and he attributed its failure to the philandering methods his son had displayed. Then the prolonged absence of Esmé in France had stimulated suspicion, and even his mother, usually so tolerant, had denounced it as foolish and hazardous. Thus it will be seen that the atmosphere of Ardlesham had been by no means serene. Esmé was blamed for the ill-success of the Clethorpe scheme. But he had sat there, listening, smiling blandly, thinking of Viola, aware of an occasional impulse to tell his mother the whole story. But although his parents were at variance over many things, they presented an united front in the matter of his mar-

riage. He was to marry *well*. There must be money and position, allied if possible to youth, beauty and charm.

He had hoped to find a calmer atmosphere awaiting him here in South Kensington. And now he could not help acknowledging to himself that, lovely though Viola was, she lacked the gentle amenable disposition which would have accepted his word as final. He didn't like scenes, and already the discussion was being conducted with the acerbity associated with scenes.

She was determined to publish their marriage, and he was equally determined to keep it a secret. And now within an hour of their meeting she had returned with unabated ardor to the charge.

Well, if she persisted. . . . Yes, he had his answer to that too, if she drove him into a corner.

He looked at her out of his half-closed eyes. But when he tried to take her hand as a preliminary to those caresses which were to drive all disagreeable thoughts out of her head, she quietly released it.

"No, Esmé; we must discuss this seriously."

Even in these few days she had changed. She had become, as it were, much more of a woman. Older, more capable, with a new poise and assurance.

"I don't know what's come over you," he said, in a slightly exasperated tone. "You're not a bit nice to me to-day, darling. If I'd known you were going to be in this argumentative mood, I shouldn't have come."

"And do you know what would have happened if you hadn't come?"

"I hope you would have cried your pretty eyes out," he replied, in a light bantering tone.

"Do you understand? If you hadn't come—if I'd felt you didn't really mean to come—I should have written to ask Percival to communicate with Ardlesham."

She was serious, then. She must have something—something of which he was ignorant—tucked away up her sleeve.

“You would have done nothing of the kind! You made me a most solemn promise.”

“No, I made no more promises than you did. I can’t let you go back to India without telling your people.”

“I am certainly not going to tell them.” He began to explain the financial arrangements that were in such promising progress at the moment. He didn’t like to say that they were conditional upon his marrying someone of whom his parents could thoroughly approve. But she brushed aside the attempted explanation.

“We’re not dependent on them. We can perfectly well live on what we’ve got between us. I daresay you’ll have to do without luxuries. But we shall have the necessities of life. Lots of people live on far less.” Her voice was sharp with decision.

“Well, my darling, I can tell you one thing. If you do write to them, you’ll never see me again.” His voice was hard too.

She flinched at the threat. He saw his advantage, and followed it up.

“If you’d only be patient and wait a bit. Things are sure to pan out all right in time. A little patience, and we shan’t lose anything.”

“Your mother used to be fond of me. I can hardly think she’d mind as much as all that!”

He stared at her.

“Mind? You don’t know her! She’d simply hate to think I’d married a Catholic—even an emancipated one!”

“Emancipated?” The word struck her like a whip.

“I mean—you’ve let it rather go by the board, haven’t you, this precious religion of yours?”

She thought bitterly: "Yes—I deserve that he should think that. But he needn't have said it."

"Don't let's quarrel, Viola darling!"

"Esmé—I've made up my mind. You must see that Percival ought to know everything. People will think it isn't all right. You see what he says about ceremonies—that aren't—that aren't valid. . . ."

As she spoke she looked straight at Esmé. His face was ghastly pale, he averted his eyes so as not to meet hers.

"You must see that I couldn't have people thinking it wasn't all right. . . ."

Esmé had risen from his chair. His face was white and hard; his green eyes blazed with passion.

"Well, then, it isn't all right!" he exclaimed, angrily.

Viola had risen too, and now she put out her hand and clutched the rim of a polished table that stood near her. As yet the full significance of his words had hardly penetrated across her dazed senses. She felt only as if she had received a blow that for the moment had deprived her of full consciousness.

"Since you've forced my hand I'd better tell you the truth. Your brother hit the nail on the head. It isn't all right!"

"How do you mean . . . it isn't all right?" she said. She felt anew the old sinking sensation at her heart.

"My dear child, you're not my wife at all. Why, I didn't think that ceremony would have deceived a baby! I meant to make it all square afterward, when things had quieted down a bit at Ardlesham, but you've pushed me into a corner, with this threat of disclosure."

Her first feeling was not one of shame nor even of sorrow. It was a fierce hatred of this man whom

once she had loved, dispossessing that love. She understood now why people sometimes in the heat of passion slew those they had loved.

"Percival will make you marry me," she said.

"Oh, no, he won't," said Esmé.

He wondered then if he had put himself within reach of the law by going through a false ceremony of marriage with a minor. The word conspiracy, as he knew, covered a very large area of misdemeanors. He underwent a moment of acute discomfiture.

Then he went up to her with his bland smile.

"Look here, Viola darling, I did mean to marry you. I loved you, and I felt I must win you if not by fair means then by foul. I didn't want to quarrel with my father, and I suppose I ought to have waited. I've behaved like a blackguard, and now I've made you hate me. But it isn't any use your writing to my people. We are not married—that was a sham ceremony, with a sham parson."

She was silent.

"And of course if Percival insists, I'm ready to pay—"

"Pay? Do you think I'd touch your money?" She was angry, but behind her anger blind terror reigned. She had the sense of having been caught in a cruel trap whose teeth would go on tearing and tearing at her flesh.

And Esmé would depart, lightly and carelessly as ever, leaving her to her doom. . . .

She still felt as if she were dreaming. One of those hideous nightmares when you found yourself alone in a long passage with all the doors and windows tightly shut and locked, so that there was no means of egress. No way of escape . . . and something, menacing and formless and terrible, pursuing you to your hurt . . .

"You needn't be afraid," she said; "I won't tell

your real name to Percival. I think I should be ashamed for him to know it."

His look of relief increased her contempt.

When she gazed at Esmé now, in the light of her new and profound knowledge of his character, as of a man who had remorselessly tricked and duped her, relying on her old quality of silence, she wondered how she could ever have loved him. Boy and man, he had ever been false, deceitful and faithless. That rooted characteristic of egoism had hardened, as determined egoism alone can harden, all his finer sensibilities. All of a sudden she became aware of how worthless was this man for whom she had sacrificed so much. And paradoxically this thought brought with it another—a sense of relief that she was not his wife and did not belong to him.

"Will you go away now, please, Mr. Craye?" She called him by that name for the first time in her life. Ever since she had known him he had been Esmé to her. "I think we can have nothing else to say to each other."

She was beautiful in that proud queenly indignation of hers. He understood that she had nothing but contempt for him now, contempt and a cold repulsion that one sometimes feels for a small and rather horrible little insect. In that moment he realized the essential worth and nobility of the woman he was casting so lightly away. If she would only wait—even now it wasn't too late to arrange things . . . he was passing through a difficult moment . . . but things were bound to straighten out . . . if she would only wait. He looked at her wistfully. He seemed to have the dreadful power of divining the process that was at work within her mind, disintegrating thread by thread the woof of their brief shared life and love.

He moved a step nearer. "Oh, we're not going

to part like this, my darling," he said. But the gay charm of his smile was lost upon her.

"I mean what I say. Go at once!"

She went to the door and opened it for him. He tried to take her hand, but she drew it sharply away, shrinking from even this slight conventional contact.

"Will you go, Mr. Craye? Do you wish me to call for help?"

She was splendid in her outraged dignity.

"Viola—Viola—I can't go away like this . . ." He was pleading now.

Her face was inexorable. He stumbled past her; she heard him go downstairs and into the hall. There was something ignominious about his exit, just as if he had been the one to be duped and fooled. She followed him, and as he went out of the front door she was there to close it after him. The sound echoing through the house held a peculiar significance for them both. It was final, like the sounding of a knell when the soul has departed.

She stood there in the hall, clenching her hands.

"It's ended—utterly ended," she said, aloud.

She went into the little study at the back of the dining-room and sank upon the sofa. She shivered violently, and for a moment the old sensation of physical faintness mastered her. She groped her way into the dining-room and drank some water that was on the sideboard. It revived her. She flung herself upon the sofa and leaning back closed her eyes.

"It's ended—utterly ended . . ." But the repeated words failed to reassure her. Was anything indeed ever ended? Did not every sin hold its ineluctable sequence, the harvest, the wages, the expiation, the sentence one could not escape? It was like a little trickle of some dark noisome fluid flow-

ing through all the beautiful golden days of life, smudging and staining them.

Ended? It had only just begun. Still she tried to reassure herself.

"It is ended. No one need ever know except Percival."

She went up to her room.

CHAPTER XX

THE days passed monotonously. The weather in London was hot and sultry with that peculiar airlessness which makes August such a trying month there. Viola flagged a little under the stress and strain of those solitary days. She was very quiet, moving like one in a dream, scarcely able to realize her own misfortune, bearing it with a kind of dumb apathetic fortitude that gave place at times to fits of unaccountable terror.

She wrote a letter to Percival entreating him and Cecily not to tell anyone of her marriage. She would explain when she saw them why it was necessary at present not to divulge it. She extracted a promise of like secrecy from Rebecca.

She had been alone a week when one afternoon Esmé was announced. She had so little feared or hoped for a visit from him that she had not even thought it worth while to tell Rebecca that if he called she would not be at home. She looked up in anger and astonishment when his name was announced. She had felt absolutely confident that he had gone away forever, that he would never dare approach her again.

Her heart beat a little more quickly. Something of her old feeling for him came back to her. She felt then that if she had really been his wife she

would have loved him always, faithfully, forgivingly. She could have helped him. Hers was the stronger character of the two. And her love for him was not dead. Seeing him thus suddenly and unexpectedly she was forced to realize this. She wanted achingly to feel his kiss once more. She had been so alone—it was terrible, this solitude, peopled only with the ghost of Esmé's love, with the memories of their brief life together.

He came forward quietly and took her hand.

"It's awfully good of you to see me, Viola," he said. He spoke in a grave hushed voice.

She knew by the manner in which he spoke, that he had returned in a penitent mood. Perhaps he had some petition to make; perhaps he had only come, actuated by an egoistic impulse, to ascertain whether he could really rely upon her silence, her promise not to reveal his identity.

She looked fragile, he thought, in that white dress of hers. It was as if her physical health had suffered from the shock to which he had so brutally exposed her. Her face was white and thin, under the closely-brushed dark hair.

"Won't you sit down?" she said.

He sat down. It was not easy to reveal the object of his visit to this cold silent woman who looked at him with such strange eyes. He blurted out the truth at last without preliminary.

"I've told my people I want to marry you—that I shall never marry anyone else," he said. "And as I'm going away, and I may see active service, they have given in. I didn't say anything about our . . . supposed marriage. . . . I just told them we were engaged—that we loved each other. I needn't tell you all the details, Viola; some of them were very unpleasant. But the long and the short of it is that they'll give their consent and

make it possible for us to marry on one condition”

“What condition, Esmé?” she said. She leaned forward and now a distinct gleam of relief, even of happiness, illuminated the rigidity of her face.

“Well, for one thing they won’t hear of a Catholic ceremony, and they insist, too, that any children we may have, are to be brought up as Protestants. I said I didn’t think you’d have any objection to that. You were ready to marry me before on those conditions, although they were never categorically specified.”

Viola sat there, very still, her hands folded in her lap. Her face wore again its meditative, brooding look.

She had not expected this, perhaps it was the last thing she had expected. It was like the impossible happening. Since her parting with Esmé, a parting she had believed to be final, she had turned her thoughts from time to time to the thought of that confession she would have to make in order to regain the spiritual things she had forfeited. She had felt the most bitter sorrow for her past disobedience, a contrition that was a kind of natural reaction. She had thought that perhaps to-morrow if she felt well enough she would go and make her confession to an old and wise priest whom she had known for many years. She was preparing to make a full and careful revelation of guilt. For, although she was very young and had been cruelly duped, she was yet deeply conscious of guilt. She had deliberately disobeyed the laws of her Church, cutting herself off from the consolations of its Sacraments. There had been days when she had felt like a pariah, an outcast, almost a leper. And even in her happiness, the human happiness of her life with Esmé, she had suffered. She had never felt at ease. She dared not pray. Her soul might not seek the divine

nourishment without which it must surely perish. She had fallen from grace. This was why in the first instance she had felt an almost sick relief when she learned that she was not and had never been Esmé Craye's wife. The path was open—she could go back . . . *Father, I have sinned against heaven and before Thee* . . . Oh, happy moment when the prodigal is received back into favor, and regains the forfeited friendship of Christ! . . . She had let her thoughts dwell persistently upon this aspect of the case, trying to cling to the inevitable gain rather than to lament the greatness of her loss.

And now Esmé had returned, with temptation on his lips. He would marry her, and of his love for her there seemed to be now no question. When it was too late he had risked his parents' anger by revealing that love. He could not let her go without an effort. He had duped her, wronged her, fooled her, but he was prepared to make amends. And for all this he asked a price. . . .

For the happiness of restored honor in becoming Esmé's wife, recognized, acknowledged, she must barter the birthright, the spiritual heritage of her children. Her children . . . Her heart almost stopped at the word.

Ignorant as she was, she suddenly realized as if by some subtle instinct of clairvoyance the meaning of that physical malaise which had first definitely declared itself when she fainted at Boulogne, soon after hearing the news of Esmé's recall. Yes, it meant just that, that some day there would be a child. Had she not always felt that the consequences of her sin would affect not only her own life but perhaps another life, even countless lives stretching far down into the years? Now she was certain of it. There would be a child, and on behalf of that child she would have to make, either in one sense or another, a great refusal.

Had Esmé guessed anything? Was that why he had suddenly pressed so urgently for his parents' permission? Was it because he loved her too well to bring shame and disgrace upon her? Or had he come now simply because he had in these few days sensed what life would be like apart from her and found himself unable to bear it?

She put this questioning aside. What she had to decide was a matter that hardly now seemed to concern either herself or Esmé. It concerned that life that some day should stir within her. She followed this train of thought with deadly logic. If she refused to marry Esmé her child would be illegitimate. It would be nameless. A stigma of shame would forever be attached to it. It was impossible always to hide such a thing as that, especially in the case of a boy. Schools and colleges demanded certificates of birth. She compared this dismal vision with the brilliant future of Esmé Craye's eldest son, the child of such dazzling prospects, who one day would be Lord Bethnell, heir to an immense fortune, to a title, to vast property. That steady storing-up of stocks and shares, gold and land and houses, due to the assiduous industry, the close economy of the first Lord Bethnell, would pass to that child, in all human probability, if she consented to marry Esmé now.

It was indeed for this child and on behalf of it, that the choice must be made. She must rob it either of its spiritual or its temporal inheritance. She looked at Esmé, wondering if he guessed anything of that conflict into which the subtle dilemma had inexorably plunged her.

Perhaps if she had not yielded that first time to his refusal to be married in a Catholic church, if she had not tasted that spiritual isolation, that sense of being shut out from life and light, of wandering and feeding on the unsatisfying husks, she might have consented to marry him now on the conditions

laid down. She would perhaps have salved her conscience with the consoling thought that her influence over Esmé was so great that in time she would win him to the faith, and thus secure the faith of her children. But she had learned many things about Esmé in the course of their brief life together. It had left her absolutely without illusions. Her old worship was dead. She was not without love for him, but she realized to the full how hard, egoistic, and faithless he was. She could never influence him, and if she married him it would mean that all their children would be brought up as Protestants.

And then the other side of the picture that rose before her again and again, lurid and terrible, and inevitable in its sure materialization! . . . That going out into the wilderness, and bringing her child secretly into the world with all the attendant suffering. . . . Hiding the knowledge of its shame from it as long as possible. Living somewhere where her story was not known, shrinking always from the careless inquisitive question, the discerning eye. Always, always afraid of discovery. . . . And then later on when the child grew up and was able to understand, the inevitable moment of revelation. Telling it the truth about her own cruel dilemma, showing it just what it had gained, and how little really it had lost . . . begging for its forgiveness, and entreating it to tell her with kisses of love that she had been amply justified in her decision. . . .

For in these past weeks Viola had learned, during her arbitrary separation from it, the true significance and worth of the Catholic Faith. Hitherto she had taken it rather for granted as an essential and integral part of her daily life, practicing her religion faithfully, but remaining in a sense unawakened, like a person who has never realized how deep his love has been until confronted by the separation

imposed by death. Now she saw the Catholic Faith in its true light, as the *one thing needful*. Nothing else mattered. No other loss or separation or suffering or shame. And if she brought up her child with this ideal always before its young vision, it would surely in the end not only forgive her but thank her for the sacrifice she had made, and assure her that she had been a thousand, thousand times justified in her choice.

She could not retrieve that first false step, but she could at least show how sincere was her contrition. She couldn't wipe away the unsightly thing from her past life, it would be there always to remind her that once she had fallen away, through human love, from the grace of God, and that only by His infinite Mercy she had not been suffered to die in a state of sin, cut off from the consolations of the Church.

And now another life was involved, a life interwoven inextricably with her own. She could not brush aside responsibility in regard to that life. She couldn't tell herself: "Perhaps we shall never have children," to justify herself in bartering their spiritual heritage now. She was looking at life from an entirely new angle. Already she was aware of something of the immense responsibility of maternity. It was as if through her child she could see God more clearly.

"We can be married immediately," Esmé continued, wondering a little at her long silence. "I have to start for India at the end of next week, and that gives us plenty of time. You would of course go out with me. And Viola—"

"Yes?" she said.

"My mother asked me to say that she hopes you will come down to Ardlesham with me this evening and spend a few days with us. She wants you to

know my father. You will come, darling, won't you?"

His voice was tender and pleading, almost humble. It was as if he were praying for her forgiveness, for the renewal of her love.

Viola had often longed to go to Ardlesham, to see Esmé in the midst of his intimate family life, as the only son of the house. She had passionately wished to be received by his parents. He could hardly have offered her a more subtle temptation. It even flashed through her mind: "Perhaps I shall be able to persuade them to rescind this harsh condition."

The sultry airlessness of London was affecting her health. Her long solitude, her wakeful miserable nights, had made her nervous and dispirited. And to be taken away from all this, to go to Ardlesham, to be kindly welcomed and received by Esmé's parents as his beloved *fiancée*, offered a prospect that was incredibly alluring.

Then she thought of the alternative again—the going out into the wilderness . . . the loneliness . . . the shame . . . the suffering. Could Almighty God demand such a tremendous sacrifice from her? . . .

"I can't come—I can't marry you—" she said, abruptly.

Esmé gazed at her in astonishment.

"But of course you're going to marry me, my darling child. I've taken infinite trouble to get it all settled, to make your path easy. You can't go back on me now." He rose and came toward her, and his voice was shaken with emotion. "I love you—I've learned in this past week—ever since we parted—that I can't live without you. Yes, it has been hell, all these days at Ardlesham—this feeling that perhaps I should never see you again."

"What you ask is impossible."

"Impossible?"

She looked at him steadily.

"I refuse to rob my child of its birthright."

"What do you mean?" The color rushed to his face. What *could* she mean?

"You remember the day I fainted in Boulogne? Since then I have thought—there might be a child. That child must be a Catholic."

"But don't you see—if that's true—we must be married without delay? Why, there's all the more reason . . . Viola—you don't know what you're saying—you're too young to judge . . . Religion doesn't matter. It'll be a Christian—we Protestants aren't quite heathens, you know! You can't be allowed to throw away your good name just for a caprice. Why, what do you think would become of you? A woman with an illegitimate child! Why, it's unthinkable. You must be mad . . . you can't have thought it out . . ."

"I have thought it out. I must rob my child in one of two ways. And I choose this way."

He flung himself impetuously on his knees at her feet, and clasped both her hands in his.

"Viola—Viola—you can't . . . when I love you so . . . You must marry me—no one need ever know. And I love you. . . ."

"I can only marry you if you'll let me bring up my children in my own Faith. You must make that promise."

"Ah, that's the one thing they'll never agree to. It's the one point about which they're inexorable."

"Even if you were to tell them the truth?"

"That would make matters ten times worse. And it's an ugly story—I'd rather they didn't know. Viola, when you consented to marry me before, you were ready to waive the Catholic ceremony—the question of dispensation—the promises. Why can't

you do without them now, when it's all important both for your own and the child's sake that we should be married as soon as possible?"

"Because I understand better now. And I feel a great responsibility toward my child."

"Your child won't thank you for depriving it of its name!"

"My child will understand."

He could hardly believe that she was the same Viola, so changed was she from the happy girl he had pretended to marry a few weeks before. So innocent—so ignorant—it had been so pitifully easy to dupe her, that in his secret shame he had almost confessed to her the vileness of his plot. She was a woman now; she had no illusions; she knew that she had been tricked and duped by a man who was unscrupulous, untrustworthy and faithless. She would not accept the amends he offered her. She was determined to give her child something that with all his prospective wealth he could never bestow upon it.

In her beauty, her cold courage, her willingness to face shame and suffering for an ideal, he saw with a sense of desperate eternal loss the nobility of the woman he had loved to their mutual hurt.

She neither asked nor would she accept reparation at his hands. He was nothing to her now. All her thoughts, her hopes, even her love, were concentrated upon this unborn child. She was content to let him go. But he couldn't believe that she realized what her life would be. The world has its own codes, and in that world there is little place for the unwedded woman with her illegitimate child. And to choose this path of ostracism when she might have been his wife! The folly of it—the criminal folly of it. . . .

She listened in silence to his continued pleading.

Her face never changed in its pale, calm immovability. She did not speak. She must have heard him, but she made no sign. He rose at last, and there were tears in his eyes as he stood and gazed at her.

"Viola—my love—my wife . . . you don't know what you're doing. That life—you'll never bear it. The punishment will fall on you—"

Memory mockingly flashed before him a picture from the old Ardlesham days when he had led Viola to her home, a bruised bleeding child. He could see Miss Malleson, a tall figure, a veritable incarnation of destiny, waiting for them, watching their slow progress toward the gate. And he could hear her grim voice saying: *Viola knows the consequences of disobedience . . .* He could remember his own little thrill of horror and shame. Viola had never tried to exonerate herself by blaming him, the leader in all those primrose paths that spelt ultimate disaster. And she would not try to exonerate herself now by laying the blame on him. She accepted her own share of guilt and she was ready, as ever, to expiate it in silence.

She rose too.

"Will you go now, please, Esmé? I don't think I can bear any more. And it's no use—my mind is made up. You must tell Lord Bethnell that my religion is more to me than anything else in the world, and that I'm not prepared to forego it on behalf of my . . . child . . ."

Esmé put out his hand. But she did not take it. As he moved toward the door her grave eyes followed him. He paused as he reached the threshold.

"You'll be sorry for this, you know. You're too young to make such a tremendous decision off your own bat. But if you change your mind—"

"I shall not change my mind."

The door closed after him. . . .

CHAPTER XXI

VIOLA half dreaded and half looked forward to Percival's return from Dawlish. He generally came back to London a few days before the rest of his family, leaving Cecily to follow with the children whenever it should please her. And this year he arranged to return home a little earlier than usual. He wasn't satisfied with the meager and mystifying account Viola had given him of her secret marriage. He was anxious to see his sister, and to hear more details. Also, he was wise enough to perceive that conversations of such a highly confidential nature were best held in the absence of his wife.

Percival was very fond of Viola; he admired her immensely, and wished to see her happily married. He was aware that she didn't fit well into her present position in his house, and he disliked to think that Cecily compelled her to spend so many hours daily in teaching his children. In the future he meant to change all that. The children were old enough to go to school. And if Cecily still opposed that plan she must engage a regular governess for them.

Viola's marriage had to a certain extent changed and modified her position in his household. To begin with, she would now be quite independent; her small fortune was her own from the day of her marriage. There would be a certain amount of inevitable business to be accomplished, and the sooner it was done the better. But the facts in themselves were sufficiently alarming. Here was Viola, a married woman, who had consented, most rashly as it seemed to him, to a clandestine marriage, living once more in the home of her girlhood, parted from

her husband after a few weeks. The matter required explanation.

"There's something jolly fishy about it," thought Percival, as the Plymouth express whirled him Londonward.

Viola should have asked his advice. He had always been on friendly terms with her. There was no reason in the world for her to have the slightest fear of him. But she might have told him. After all, as her brother he was one of her natural guardians till she should come of age. He had accepted the responsibilities of a guardian when he had asked her to come and live with him and his wife. And he was the only one of her brothers now in England. George was stationed at the Cape, and Matthew was still in Ceylon. *They* never troubled their heads about her, didn't care if she were married or not.

He arrived in London toward the close of a golden day in mid-September. The house had been swept and garnished, and in every room the mirrors and pictures had been released from their newspaper coverings. The floors and furniture were bright with assiduous polishing. Rebecca and Jinny had worked hard, and sometimes Mrs. Mansfield had come languidly in and helped them to wash the china and replace it on the shelves of the Chippendale cabinet, or had accomplished other little tasks that imposed no strain upon her strength.

Viola was in the drawing-room when Percival came in. The fire was lit—a small wood fire which gave an aspect of cheerfulness—and before her was the tea-table, whence proceeded the faint hissing sound of a kettle. It was a comfortable sound in the ears of a man who had just arrived from a long journey.

Percival was slightly stout and rather red in the face. He bore little resemblance to his lovely sister. His fair hair was growing thin on the top, and his

slightly prominent blue eyes were surrounded by wrinkles that gave them a humorous expression. His plump shaven cheeks were freshly colored. He looked at once old and very new.

Viola wore a white dress. His first impression was that this attire accentuated the pallor of her complexion. She was in his opinion quite extraordinarily changed. She looked more than her years. It seemed as if all the joy, the happiness, of youth had gone out of her face, leaving it with that cold, reticent look, secret, a trifle bitter.

"Well, Percival," she said. She went forward and kissed him.

"Well, my dear Vi! It's nice finding you here. I generally come back to an empty house. Cecily and the kiddies are very happy at Dawlish, and I think they'll stay as long as the weather holds."

"Are they all well?"

"Yes. Margery's awfully fit—swims like a fish." He was proud of his little daughter, though aware of her faults and limitations. "And Lionel's learning, too. Cecily sent her love. How are you, Vi, my dear?"

He turned his blue, prominent eyes upon her with a sudden disconcerting scrutiny. But her face remained pale, immobile. It held, he thought, the impress of a tragic experience simply accepted. There was something almost terrible about that simple, unspoilt yet disillusioned expression which Percival—usually far from subtle in his criticisms—could not but perceive.

"I'm quite well, thank you, Percival. A little tired."

She could not tell him of those attacks of faintness increasing now in frequency. He would only question her closely, and insist upon her seeing a doctor. Where health was concerned he was oddly fussy.

"It's been so sultry—so airless—in London this year," she added.

"Yes—it was pretty muggy, too, in Devonshire."

She made tea and gave him a cup. Watching her with a new interest, he observed that she drank several cups of very strong tea as if she were a-thirst for the stimulant it offered. But she ate nothing. She was very thin—her hands and wrists were almost transparent-looking.

Percival ate and drank in silence. He was half afraid to question her. She seemed such a stranger. And he could see that in her extreme quietude she was unhappy, ill at ease, nervous perhaps of his inevitable inquiries.

"Where's your husband, Vi?" he blurted out at last, feeling it was better to come to the point.

Viola glanced at him, as if measuring his powers of tolerant acceptance. He was typical of his world, clever at his work, alert, astute, conventional. Incapable, too, of harming man or woman. She felt though that she didn't really know him except in quite a superficial manner, as a kindly, good-humored person, oddly attached to his dull, malicious little wife and even finding much to admire in his obtuse offspring. She was always afraid to plumb depths, to ascertain the precise measure of another person's credulity, endurance, or tolerance. Still, the truth was necessary—as much of the truth as she was free to disclose. Not that he could help her. No one could help her. She was alone, in a strange suffering solitude whose walls were slowly closing about her.

"I—I haven't got a husband, Percival," she said, simply.

She looked straight at him as she spoke. Her gaze was as unfaltering as her voice.

Percival's red face became almost purple. "But, my dear Vi—you told us you were married!"

"Well, I thought I was. But you remember what

you said in your letter about those secret ceremonies being sometimes not valid? It proves not to have been valid."

She seemed to him perfectly unconscious of the dire significance of her statement, so simple was her manner of uttering it.

Percival's face indicated the mingled surprise and horror which her words had produced upon him.

"All the time we were on our honeymoon I believed that we were married. Protestant ceremonies are all strange to me, so I didn't find anything odd about this one. But when we got back to London I urged him to write and tell his people—I even threatened to tell them myself . . . and it was then he told me the ceremony wasn't a legal one."

"Who is this d—d blackguard?" said Percival, growing still more purple with suppressed rage and anger.

"I can't tell you his name. Besides, it doesn't matter—it can't make any difference."

"But it makes all the difference in the world! I shall take proceedings at once—you're a minor—he'll be forced to marry you—"

A strong shiver passed over her.

"But, Percival—I wouldn't marry him for all the world!"

"I'm afraid I can't let you leave it at that. I'm your trustee—your brother—it's my duty to safeguard your interests. I must take steps—your honor's at stake."

"You can't do anything," she said, in a tone of indescribable hopelessness. It was the first time she had displayed any emotion at all.

"You must tell me his name—we mustn't lose any time—"

"You shall never know his name," said Viola, with singular determination. "I only want you to give me my money, or as much of it as you can. I'll

go abroad—I shan't worry you. If I stayed here people would only annoy you with questions. I shall go on calling myself Mrs. Mansfield, and people will only think I've married someone you didn't approve of."

"But you've done nothing wrong! You've been victimized by a bad man. It's only right that you should be publicly vindicated. It is a criminal offense—a mock ceremony of marriage with a minor!"

"I was in the wrong, Percival. I married without the sanction or permission of my Church. I never tried to get a dispensation because he always refused to consider a Catholic ceremony. I've done wrong, and if I'm punished it is just what I deserve. I did it all deliberately. But I thought because I loved him—Rowland Mansfield—so much, that perhaps God wouldn't punish me."

"I am not thinking of your Church. I'm thinking of the way that you—a mere child, without any experience of the world—have been duped and hoaxed. You were too young to know what you were doing—"

"I did know that as a Catholic I was doing wrong," she persisted, obstinately. "At one time that thought almost stopped me."

"And you were brought up so carefully. I used to think Aunt Hope was severe, but at least I knew she was conscientious."

"Yes," assented Viola, wearily.

"Well, you must give me the name of this scoundrel. He must be exposed. I daresay the threat of exposure will bring him to his senses, and induce him to marry you."

"I won't marry him. Understand that once and for all. And you can't expose him without exposing me."

"But, my dear Vi—you were a victim. The world can't possibly blame you."

"Ah, but I blame myself . . ."

"You must give me his name and let me deal with him."

"There's nothing you can do. And, Percival—it's no use your trying to find out. He isn't in England. He has gone abroad. He did come here before he went away, and begged me to marry him."

"He begged you to marry him? Then why on earth—?"

"His conditions were too hard."

"Conditions? But you should have married him no matter how hard the conditions were."

"That's just what I couldn't do."

"And why not?"

"He would only marry me on condition that my child should be brought up a Protestant."

"Your child?"

"Yes, Percival, my child . . ."

There was a long silence. Percival walked restlessly up and down the room. Viola must be mad. It was useless to try to help her, for she rejected all help. If the man had offered to repair the injury and marry her legally, and she had refused, there was nothing left for him to do.

"I shall insist upon your marrying him. You shan't have your money unless you do."

"Oh, well, I can work," she said, wearily.

"Work? What can you do?"

"Teach," said Viola.

"But, my dear girl, who is going to employ you?"

He gazed at her, aghast at her obstinacy.

"If you won't think of yourself, for Heaven's sake think of your child. You ought to put yourself and your religious scruples on one side. At least you could have gone through the form of marriage with this Mansfield in order to legitimize it."

"I *am* thinking of my child. I am not going to deprive it of its spiritual heritage. It was this very knowledge that made me decide as I did. Percival—" she rose and came toward him. "I'm sorry—I'm very sorry. I feel as if I'd disgraced our name. But I'll go abroad. The few people who think I'm married needn't ever know that I'm not. I should like to go away very soon . . ."

"I simply can't have you wandering about the continent alone. Besides, this man must contribute to your support."

"Never!" Her eyes flashed. "I've told him I will never touch a penny of his money."

Everywhere he was confronted by this reckless burning of boats.

"Viola—of course you shall have your money, as much as you can have until you come of age. I'll pay it into the bank to-morrow and then every quarter. You can draw it as you choose. You mustn't starve."

"Thank you, Percival. I knew you'd be kind. And you can't do anything more for me. I'm a scapegoat. I must go out into the wilderness." She smiled—he thought it was the saddest thing he had ever seen.

Then she went out of the room, leaving him to meditate upon the cruel tangle which she refused so resolutely to unravel.

Viola spent some miserable days in South Kensington with her brother. He kept his word and saw that a sum of money was paid into her account, and being really generous he added a certain amount of his own to it. He feared if she did fulfill her threat of going abroad, that she might not at first know how to manage her affairs prudently. But his legal mind declined to leave it at that, and whenever he saw her, he returned to the attack with unabated

vigor. He would demand her full confidence; he repeatedly urged her to give him the name of this man who had so deceived and duped her. But Viola was perfectly consistent in her reticence. She realized, however, for the first time, that Percival was a man of indomitable secret obstinacy. Beneath all their superficial dissimilarity they had a certain likeness of disposition. It was evident to Viola that he and Cecily could never have disagreed on any matter of fundamental importance, or she could not have continued to rule him so easily after eight years of matrimony.

The day of Cecily's return approached. October had set in, with mild, golden, balmy days. The weather was delicious, sunny with blue skies, and a crisp autumn nip in the air, stealing out of the early morning mists.

"It is certainly very dreadful about Viola," Cecily wrote, for Percival had not liked to keep her altogether in the dark as to the true state of affairs. "She can count on me to say nothing, for I feel the disgrace of it all far more than she can possibly do. Fortunately we have never mentioned her marriage, and it will be quite easy to go on saying nothing at all about it. I was always against her going to Venice. I felt that a life of pleasure was the worst possible thing for a girl of that type. I hope she will begin to teach the children seriously now."

Percival tried to soften this scheme. "Cecily hopes you'll give the children their lessons again, when they come back. But I expect you'd rather not."

Viola made no answer. Afterward he remembered that she looked at him strangely. At the time he thought little of it. She was often silent now and nervous and inclined to start if one spoke to her suddenly.

Viola went up to her room and rang the bell.

Rebecca soon afterward appeared. Since Viola's return she had shown an increase of dog-like devotion, as if she suspected that things were not going well with her.

"Rebecca, bring both my trunks, please. I shall be going away early to-morrow. Don't say anything to Mr. Hudson or to the servants. Bring the hat-box, too."

Rebecca's prim mouth dropped apart. "Beg pardon, ma'am, but were you intending to go alone?"

"Yes. But, I tell you this in confidence, I want everyone to think I'm going to join Mr. Mansfield. It is better they should think that, do you understand?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"But I'll tell *you* as a secret that I'm going abroad alone."

"Must it be abroad, ma'am? I don't hold with them foreign countries where there's no making out what they're talking about. And I've a sister in York where you could stay till—nearer the time. She lets rooms."

Nearer the time? Was it possible that Rebecca had discovered her secret? Viola flushed. "No—no, I'd rather go abroad."

Rebecca looked steadily at Viola. A change came over her hard, grim face. Then she said quietly: "If that's the case, ma'am, I will accompany you, if you'll allow me."

Even then the prim sententious speech gave Viola a wild inclination to laugh.

"Oh, thank you very much, Rebecca, but I'm afraid it's impossible. I've only just enough money for one."

"I've saved a bit, ma'am. And I shall be no expense to you in the way of wages," said Rebecca.

"I shall leave to-morrow directly Mr. Hudson's gone out. He starts at ten, doesn't he? I shall take

the afternoon boat train. You can come to the station with me, Rebecca." She went up to her and impulsively kissed her. "I shall never forget your kindness."

"I hope you won't be offended, ma'am, but it isn't safe for you to be going about alone. I shall leave a note for Mrs. Hudson. Cook and Jinny can carry on quite well for a few days, with Kate to help, until Mrs. Hudson is suited."

"But you've been here such years, Rebecca. Ever since Aunt Hope died."

"Yes, ma'am."

"You mustn't give up such a good place for me. I shall be very poor, Rebecca."

"If you please, ma'am, I'd rather be with you. And you'll want someone later on. It had better be me than a stranger."

She went out of the room and herself fetched Viola's boxes. Then she went up to her own attic to pack. Her letter to Mrs. Hudson was a model of regret and respect, but she offered no reason for her sudden departure, and the other servants believed that she was going away for her annual holiday. It was not until some days later, that it was discovered she had accompanied Viola in her flight into the wilderness.

END OF BOOK I

VIOLA HUDSON

BOOK II

VIOLA HUDSON

BOOK II

CHAPTER I

MATTHEW HUDSON was sitting in the veranda of his bungalow, situated upon the heights of Kellioya in Ceylon, reading some English newspapers which a "tappal" coolie had just brought across eight miles of jungle-clad hill and dale.

Hudson was a big raw-boned man, over six feet in height and clumsily made, but with immense strength in his arms. He had broad shoulders, a large head with roughly-hewn features, thick reddish hair that was now plentifully sprinkled with gray, and a complexion that was tanned to a deep yellow brown from constant exposure to a tropical sun. The whites of his eyes were also faintly tinged with yellow, and the eyes themselves had acquired that strained, slightly prominent look which European settlers in lands of fierce suns so frequently acquire.

Living in this remote spot of Ceylon and seeing but little of his fellow-men except for his overseers, assistants and coolies, he had grown careless about his dress. His veranda-made suit of light tussore was stained in places; his shoes were old, loose, and patched. He was smoking a cigar, and on a table by his side stood a long glass of whisky and water

from which he occasionally sipped a few mouthfuls.

As he read, he became aware that someone was approaching the house. Men who live alone in solitudes often possess an acute sense of hearing, and thus it was that Matthew felt certain he had heard the padding of naked feet. But he was too lazy to get up and look. The mid-day heat was great, even here in the hills. The sun shone upon the brilliant and lustrous foliage of a group of eucalyptus trees, that scented the air with their clean, health-giving, aromatic odor. Among the roses and honeysuckle that blossomed so luxuriantly, decorating the gabled roof of the bungalow, the big blue bees hummed their drowsy noonday song.

The naked feet came nearer, were actually approaching the veranda, and from the tail of his eye Matthew was aware of a squat shadow on the grass. He looked up and saw a coolie halting there. The man wore no clothing except a loin-cloth; his brown skin gleamed with perspiration and from a recent application of oil. In his slim strength he looked like a bronze statue come to life. Upon his white-turbaned head he carried a cabin-trunk which he now, with swift unaided skill, proceeded to deposit on the lowest step. Having done so, he stood in front of Matthew and made a profound salaam.

"Whose box is that?" inquired Hudson, speaking in fluent Tamil.

The coolie produced a slip of paper, which he handed respectfully to the big British figure. It bore the following legend:

*Mrs. Rowland Mansfield,
Care of Matthew Hudson, Esquire.
Kellioya.*

"Nonsense! There's some mistake. You've

come to the wrong bungalow. Probably it's someone for Mr. Keane."

Mr. Keane, his nearest neighbor of importance, lived some three miles away on an estate called Kuduwatte, across the river which gave its name to the district—the Kelli-Oya.

The coolie burst into voluble speech.

"There is no mistake—the lady and her baby are coming from the hotel in Nuwara Eliya. They drove down to the Hilgalla Rocks, and are being carried across the jungle. They will be here before sunset."

And he moved slowly away.

Although Matthew was positive there had been some mistake, since never in his life had he known anyone of the name of Mansfield, the coolie's succinct story made him feel extremely uncomfortable. Standing there in the veranda, he shouted "*Boy!*" and an aged Appu, or butler, immediately appeared. He had a wrinkled mahogany-colored face beneath his neat white turban. He was characterized by a doglike devotion to his rough, unsympathetic master and would willingly have died for him.

"Yes, master," he said, in English.

"This coolie says there's a lady coming here—she's on her way. I'm sure it's a mistake, but as she's come from Nuwara Eliya she won't want to go any farther to-day. And there's . . . there's a baby. You must get two rooms ready."

"Yes, master," replied the old man, and, salaaming respectfully, withdrew without further comment.

He had been with Matthew for many years, was aware of his passionate dislike to offering hospitality, in a land where the European is proverbially hospitable; and he was as little able to believe in the coming of this strange lady as Matthew himself.

Presently a second coolie appeared, carrying two smaller boxes, one on his head, the other in his hand.

He presented Matthew with a duplicate of the former document written in precisely the same careful upright hand. Matthew was more mystified than ever. The mistake, if mistake it was, had been deliberately made. A vague anxiety seized him. He looked down at his clothes, and for the first time became conscious of their stained and shabby condition. He hadn't spoken to a white woman for how many months—years? This was the first time a woman had ever come to stay at his bungalow. Very rarely, and only when it was impossible to avert it, he had put up a fellow planter, a wandering government official, for the night. Mansfield . . . Mansfield . . . the name conveyed nothing to him. He began to feel seriously perturbed, wondering how long she intended to stay, and how soon he could possibly get rid of her. A baby, too . . . Matthew had all the confirmed bachelor's dislike to and fear of the very young of the human species. He supposed that it would cry at night, and prevent him from sleeping. There was no getting away from a baby, and if you said anything you were regarded as a brute. . . .

The bungalow had plenty of accommodation, having been built originally by a rich man with a large and increasing family. It was moderately well-furnished, possessing most of the essentials, but there was no luxury. Matthew was a close man who preferred a penurious solitude wherein he could pursue unmolested his growing love of saving. He worked very hard, and he accumulated as much as he could of the fruits of that labor. And he liked to feel that his leisure was his own. A lady and her baby . . . Mrs. Rowland Mansfield . . . of course they had been the victims of a mistake, but it would be too late to urge them to retrace their steps to-day. They must stay at Kellioya for at least one night.

Well, she probably wouldn't be here till nearer

the evening. People always sent on their luggage ahead, to give notice of their coming, if they were, as in this case, unexpected guests. Mrs. Mansfield . . . a tiresome, fussy woman in all probability, who would require milk for the child—there was never any milk to spare—and all kinds of things for herself. She would have to dine with him—odious prospect! He had not sat down to a meal with a woman for many, many years. He wondered what he could possibly talk to her about. She must be young—fairly young in any case—since there was a baby. He must give orders to the cook that if there was any milk it must be saved for this tiresome infant. . . .

The sun was getting low in the west beyond the long line of eucalyptus trees that shut out from sight the wild stretch of mountainous country beyond, lovely now in its tones of amethyst and sapphire. Some of the nearer hills had been cleared for the planting of tea, and the trim, prim, symmetrical rows of low dark shrubs traversed them with a precise regularity that reminded one of ruled paper. Beyond the tea-plantations there were lovely regions clothed with jungle as with a deep rich mantle of fadeless verdure. There were valleys too, with deep broad rivers; great rocks where the waterfalls made vertical lines of shining silver light; "patanas" or downs with their short, coarse grass burnt brown in the sun, and then in the distance, far as eye could reach, tier upon tier of mountains raising their purple heads from seas of turquoise mist touched to gold now by the vivid brilliance of the sunset.

Matthew walked across the grass, which made quite a respectable imitation of an English lawn, and stood beneath the eucalyptus trees. He watched with indifferent eyes the wonderful beauty of the sunset, the flooding golden light, the almost un-

believable colors that decorated the western sky. He was getting slightly anxious. Some hours had passed since the mysterious arrival of the two coolies with luggage, and still there was no sign of Mrs. Mansfield. He hoped that nothing had happened. He was short of labor as it was, and he did not want to send search-parties into the jungle to-night. Already it was getting late, and in a few minutes that lovely, brilliant sky-pageant would fade into dusk, and the brief tropical twilight would give place to night.

"She ought to have been here hours ago," he said.

But even as he spoke his keen eyes discerned a movement in the path that from below where he stood wound its steep, twisted course toward the bungalow. Gradually the blots of mingled pallor and darkness resolved themselves into two groups. Yes, there were two chairs, carried by four coolies apiece. They mounted the steep slope slowly, carefully. Again the padding of naked feet fell on his ear. The chairs swayed a little, for the path was rough and narrow, and it had suffered during the last monsoon. Matthew had not had it repaired. People who knew the district well, always came round the other way. It was a trifle longer, but the path was a much better one. He stood at the top of the slope, watching the approach of the chairs.

The first one was close enough now for him to be able to see its occupant quite clearly, despite the rapidly fading light. Beneath the awning he saw what was certainly a very young and beautiful woman. On her lap she held a little baby. Quite a young baby. Not more than six months old, perhaps. Matthew wasn't much of a judge of babies, but from the diminutive size of this one he felt that it could only number a few months of existence.

The coolies, aware that they were being watched, proceeded more carefully. There was little hold for

their sure, naked feet just here at the top of the slope. But they achieved the summit without any disaster, and, halting abruptly, deposited their burdens quite near to the spot where Matthew was standing. From the first chair a white-clad figure stepped forth, just a little stiffly, as if she had been sitting in that cramped position for many hours. She carried the child on her left arm, loosely, with an easy grace born of custom.

"It doesn't look very safe like that," thought Matthew Hudson.

She approached him, smiling.

"Are you Matthew? I am Viola . . ." She held out her hand. "Your sister, Viola."

"Viola!"

The color deepened in Matthew's face. He was almost speechless with astonishment, yes, and anger. Viola and a child . . . They had no right to descend upon him like this without permission. In his letters from home there had been no mention of her marriage. And who and where was Mansfield? Why was he not looking after his wife and baby, instead of permitting them to stray about Ceylon in this unbridled fashion? Matthew had very stern notions about the duties of husbands. If they were foolish enough to saddle themselves with wives and babies, they should provide a home for them and not suffer them to wander promiscuously about the world.

"This is my daughter, Hilary," said Viola. She lifted the thin veil from her baby's face and disclosed a small cherubic sleeping countenance with a mass of damp golden curls. She bent over it with an adoring pride, looking as she did so, like some ancient Florentine Madonna. "Isn't she a darling?" she added.

"But I don't understand—you never wrote—I

didn't in the least expect you—no one ever told me you were married!"

"Oh, there's lots of time in which to tell you everything," she said, gayly. "I'm sorry to have had to take you by surprise like this, but I thought perhaps it was best not to write. That's Rebecca in the other chair—she was my maid and now she's Hilary's nurse."

By this time the remaining coolies had successfully negotiated the perilous path, and were now engaged in depositing the second chair upon the solid earth. Matthew barely glanced at the grim, tight-lipped face of the woman in gray print dress who emerged therefrom. She was elderly and plain and looked severe—he supposed all nurses had to be severe. He could dimly remember that his own had been a terror . . .

"I want to give Hilary a bath and put her to bed as soon as possible," said Viola. She transferred the baby to Rebecca's arms and went with Matthew toward the house, while nurse and child followed at a little distance.

"This is only the roughest bachelor establishment," said Matthew, "but I can put you up for the night—a shake-down, you know—and that's about all."

He felt it was necessary to make that quite clear from the outset.

Viola said nothing; she did not seem to heed him. Her eyes were fixed upon the very charming scene before her. The bungalow stood there on a slight eminence, its pointed gable etched against the evening sky. It was thickly overgrown with roses, honeysuckle, and the deep mauve bells of the *thunbergia* that showed so pale among its dark polished foliage. At their feet the grass made a soft carpet almost to the steps that led up to the house. Low pillars stood on each side of the steps with pots of

scarlet geranium upon them. The man who had built it had made of his "lodge in the wilderness" a beautiful and artistic abode. But Matthew contented himself with keeping the place in fairly decent repair. He disliked spending his money unnecessarily. A kind of rough order prevailed everywhere.

"How very pretty—it's ever so much prettier than I expected," she said, softly.

The strong sweet scent of cinchona blossom was mingled with that of the jessamine and honeysuckle that tangled the porch. All the flowers in the garden seemed to be offering their evening incense after the heat of the day.

"What a beautiful house, Matthew!" Viola paused, gazing up at it.

In the dark blue sky above it, a faint star was now visible.

"Glad you like it," growled Matthew. "But it isn't comfortable—there's no accommodation for a lady. You must put up with it for to-night, though."

Matthew was the eldest of the three Hudson sons, and he was at least eighteen years older than Viola, whom up till now he had always regarded as a child. Having signally failed at school, he had begged when quite a lad to be allowed to go to Ceylon with a friend who possessed a coffee estate there. When coffee failed, Matthew bought Kellioya from the ruined and bankrupt owner, and having invested all his small capital in it, began forthwith to plant it up with tea. He was now a rich man, though he carefully concealed the fact because he knew that George was a spendthrift and heavily in debt. Matthew had not been to England for a good many years; he never felt at his ease away from Kellioya.

Viola disregarded his allusions to her speedy departure. She characteristically postponed the

moment of explanation. There would be plenty of time for that—all the days, weeks, perhaps years, she intended to spend at Kellioya, wherein Matthew might learn within certain limits all that he desired to know. But when she glanced at his face her heart sank a little and something of her gay courage seemed to desert her. What if he should insist upon her leaving to-morrow? What if, after all, he refused to give an asylum to herself and Hilary? He was capable of this extreme conduct.

She had not seen him since she was a child of twelve or so, and she had no very clear remembrance of him, except that he had been a big, rough and terrifying man with a loud, autocratic voice. And he was still big, rough, and terrifying. He didn't look in the least like a gentleman. He had nothing of the refinement of George and Percival. He seemed to form part of these giant solitudes, immense, massive, unpolished. He had not attempted to welcome her or even to simulate pleasure in her arrival. He had nothing of the facile courtesy of the man of the world. He hated her coming, and he was not going to pretend that he didn't. Perhaps even now he was consoling himself with the belief that she would depart on the morrow.

What Matthew was really thinking was that he would take the earliest possible opportunity of showing Viola where her duty lay, and of inviting her to return to her husband. Perhaps there had been a foolish quarrel.

"Will you show me my room first, please, Matthew? Hilary always sleeps with me. And I should like to have Rebecca somewhere near."

Matthew led the way up the steps and entered the bungalow through the dining-room window. Both dining-room and drawing-room opened directly upon the veranda, and there was no hall. He marched through the room and into a passage be-

yond, that seemed to lead into mysterious back regions. Here he halted and threw open a door.

Viola saw a large, rather bare room. The floor was uncarpeted except for a few strips of worn matting. On one side there was a bed, hung with mosquito-netting, which was fastened to a post at each corner. There was an *almira* or wardrobe of teak, hardest and most resistant of woods, a chest of drawers, a couple of chairs and a table. Through a door at the farther end she could see another smaller compartment similarly furnished.

"Your maid can sleep in there," said Matthew, indicating the second room. "And the bathroom is just beyond."

"It's charming, Matthew," she said. "I shall put Hilary to bed at once. Can I have some milk for her, please? Oh, and some hot water."

By this time her calm, decided manner had wrought a magical effect upon the big clumsy man. He had had his fastnesses stormed; there had been no time in which to secure his defenses, and he was powerless to resist this determined invasion of the enemy.

"I'll go and see about it. We haven't much milk, but I told the cook to save any there was. And you'll want some tea."

"Yes, I should like some very much. It's hours since I had anything to eat."

Matthew stumbled off toward the kitchen regions, which lay outside the bungalow, beyond a series of windowless buildings known as "godowns," where various things were stored.

Well, he would see that she and her brat were housed and fed for this one night. But he would explain to her the complete unsuitability, from every point of view, of Kellioya as a habitation for a young woman with a baby of tender age.

"And if there isn't any milk, Matthew," she called after him, "we must send for some!"

Matthew paused in the doorway beyond. "Where would you send?" he inquired, grimly. "This is a very benighted spot. There isn't a bazaar within six miles. When we haven't got things, we have to learn to do without." He almost hoped there wouldn't be any milk. It would just show her . . .

"Hilary simply can't go without her milk!"

She laid Hilary upon the bed, and stooping over her kissed her with a kind of rapture. The baby was even then a curious elfin creature with yellow crinkly hair and clear green eyes, the color of a breaking wave just beneath the foam. Hers was the third generation to possess those eyes.

"He's not going to be a bit nice to us, my precious," Viola whispered.

His one glance at the baby had been informed with a peculiar aversion, not so much for the individual as for the whole unpleasant species of human mammals. Viola had resented the look; in her opinion Hilary was the loveliest thing in the world, and the most adorable. Matthew should have had the discrimination to perceive that this was no ordinary baby, but the most delicious creature imaginable.

She felt certain from the outset, that she would have trouble with Matthew. He wasn't easy-going like Percival, nor recklessly generous like George. And how would he receive her confession if he insisted upon knowing the details of that sordid story?

CHAPTER II

TO SAY that Matthew Hudson was disconcerted by the arrival of his sister, would be to understate the acute condition of mental perturbation in which he now found himself. She had invaded his

bungalow with nurse and child at a few hours' warning, when it was too late to take any measures which could conceivably stop her from coming, and dismally he began to wonder what plan he could possibly form to dispossess her, now that she was actually there. A man you could always kick out, he reflected, using physical force if necessary, and Matthew, being powerfully built and of enormous muscular strength, would not have hesitated to employ such means of ridding himself of an unwelcome male intruder. But a woman—a young and beautiful woman—your own sister too, for although she might be quite a stranger you couldn't overlook the tie of blood . . . that was another matter. And the assurance of her—that manner that seemed to relegate you to the kitchen and those highly mysterious regions known in the East as godowns—you couldn't do much against that! She was quite evidently taking refuge with him, had decided to avail herself and her brat of the shelter his bungalow could so well afford to give her. And yet at the same time she had an air of somehow conferring, high-handedly, a favor upon you.

He remembered his telegram when the family had suggested that he should have Viola to live with him. Perhaps she had decided not to risk a repetition of that ancient curt refusal.

Matthew was angry, rebellious, determined, whatever happened, to oppose her evident intention to take up her abode with him, yet he went off quite meekly, to confer with the cook upon the all-important subject of milk.

There was very little, but perhaps it would be enough for this evening. Master had had rice pudding for his "breakfast," and much milk had been used for that, the cook reminded him. But the kitchen coolie could go at once to Mr. Keane's and ask that milk might be sent over on the morrow,

Mr. Keane had many cows, it was certain therefore that he would have much milk. The "Little Missy" should have plenty of milk to-morrow.

"I'll give him a chit to take over to Keane *durai*," said Hudson.

He went into his own room and hastily scribbled on a scrap of paper: "Dear Keane, My sister Mrs. Mansfield has arrived unexpectedly with her baby, and we have hardly any milk. It would be awfully good of you to give my coolie any you can spare, and let us have some regularly for the present. Yours, M. H."

The letter would serve two purposes: it would insure a supply of milk, and it would inform Mr. Keane, a harmless gossip, of Viola's arrival. The news that a lady was staying at Kellioya would certainly spread like wildfire through the district, and Matthew dreaded to find himself being "chaffed" by his friends, and maliciously discussed by his enemies. And it was far too unique an event to escape notice. Coolie would tell coolie upon the road. There were the ten coolies who had carried chairs and luggage across the jungle; there were also the people in the Nuwara Eliya hotel. A little colony was always Argus-eyed. And like all hermits and misogynists Matthew had a morbid dread of gossip. But even in this remote and sparsely populated district it was almost impossible to elude it altogether.

And Keane, a widower living alone, with his two sons at school in England, always had every trivial Ceylon happening at his fingers' ends. It was indeed quite possible that he already knew all about the arrival of Mrs. Mansfield with her child and nurse. Perhaps he was at this moment speculating as to her probable identity. Matthew was almost thankful to have this opportunity of informing him that Mrs. Mansfield was his own sister.

When he returned to the veranda, he found Viola standing there, evidently waiting for him. Her tall slight figure detached itself in pallid silhouette from the surrounding shadows, lit faintly by a lamp within the drawing-room. She had taken off her hat, and he could see the beauty of her little head with its close-growing dark hair, the low square brow, sharply perpendicular, the small pale face with its classic grace of outline, the dark eyes. In that moment he realized almost reluctantly how beautiful she was. As a child, though pretty enough, she had never given promise of such arresting loveliness. The sudden knowledge deepened his slowly-growing misgivings. She wasn't a person who would long be content with the kind of life Kellioya could offer, nor was she the sort of woman you could put in the background and hide. People must assuredly have noticed her; on the steamer coming out, at the Colombo hotel, on her way up-country in the train. And perhaps they had already ascertained that she was "old Hudson's" sister. Matthew had been called "old Hudson" long before age had given him the slightest claim to such sobriquet.

It was a cruel, sardonic jest of fate to send him a sister at all, let alone such a sister as this one . . .

She turned to him coolly.

"Oh, what about the milk for Hilary?"

Her clear voice held a note of authority. She was evidently accustomed to "fending" for herself and the child.

"There isn't very much. She shall have what there is. And I've sent over to Keane to ask him to let us have a regular supply—for the present."

"Oh, that's most awfully kind of you, Matthew," she said.

"I'm sorry things aren't more ship-shape, but I hope you'll be able to manage for a day or two. You see, I didn't expect you. And I'm not a sociable kind

of man—I never have any guests.” There was a certain disgust in his tone. “You should have written to tell me.”

“I didn’t write on purpose,” she replied, coolly; “I felt sure you’d make some excuse for not having us. Like you did before, you know, when I left school. I had to fall back on Percival and Cecily then. So this time I didn’t even give you the chance of refusing.”

“Well, you can’t stay here now, if that’s what you’re driving at,” growled Matthew. “I don’t mind putting you and your brat up for a couple of nights, till you’re rested from your journey. But after that you must go back to your husband as soon as possible. I’m all for married people making the best of their own bad job. And, anyhow, it must be very early days for you to quarrel. That baby of yours can’t be more than a few months old.”

“She is nearly seven months old,” said Viola; “of course I know she’s tiny. And she was horribly delicate at first, but she’s getting on famously now.”

“Where is your husband? Why aren’t you with him? The sooner you write and make it up with him, the better!”

There was not much light in the veranda, but Viola sat facing the door of the drawing-room so that what little there was fell full upon her face. Matthew could see that she grew paler and that her eyes became suddenly dark and somber with a queer brooding look.

“I shall never go back to my husband,” she said, “and what is more, I couldn’t if I wanted to. Some day I’ll tell you the whole story, Matthew, but you mustn’t ask me to do so to-night. It is rather a horrible one, and you won’t like it much. Hilary and I have no home, and we have only just enough to live on. We shan’t be in your way if you’ll let us

stay under your roof, and we'll pay for all that we eat and drink."

Her eyes looked into his; they were hard and bright.

"Oh, that's impossible! It isn't a question of money at all. But I prefer to live alone. You must go away—the day after to-morrow. And it's absurd to say you can't go back to your husband. I shall see that you do go back—it's your duty—and you're too young to judge for yourself. You must both go away . . ."

She went up to him. About her there was a faint fragrance as of some woodland flower.

"We simply can't," she said, "as you'll see for yourself when you hear the whole story. Dear Matthew—you can't turn us out of doors. And this is such a quiet, remote place—so far from everyone—just the place for us . . . for me and Hilary."

"Why didn't you stay with Percival?"

"Cecily wouldn't have had me, so I didn't suggest it. She hates scandals."

"And so do I. I won't have you here. I'll write to your husband. I'll insist upon his providing a home for you."

"Matthew—you'll never be able to do that because I shall not tell you his real name nor where he lives. I've never told that to a soul. My marriage was a secret one. And afterward I discovered that it wasn't a real ceremony at all—it was a mock one. I'm not married, I haven't a husband . . ."

Matthew stared at her from under his shaggy, jutting brows. The expression on his face was not a very pleasant one. His thoughts, deeply concentrated upon this appalling confession, circled round the diminutive person of Hilary. All at once Viola's obvious adoration of her baby seemed to him a shameless emotion. She ought to have hidden her out of sight. But to thrust her upon him here—!

"Do you mean this brat of yours is illegitimate?" he demanded.

She flinched at the word. Alas, all through her life, the life that ought to have been so pure and beautiful, this ugly stigma of dishonor would attach itself to Hilary.

She was silent.

"The man must be made to marry you," he said, white with anger. "Percival's a lawyer—he ought to have seen to it."

"I wouldn't marry him for all the world!"

"That's nonsense—you must be made to marry him. Is he in decent circumstances?"

"Yes."

"Your superior in point of birth?"

"He would think so."

"And how do you know the marriage wasn't legal?"

"He told me so."

"And why didn't you take steps immediately?"

"Because," and she lifted her head with a proud little gesture he never forgot, "because—I didn't wish to marry him. He offered me marriage."

Matthew stared at her with mingled contempt and disgust.

"Then why on earth were you such a fool as to refuse?"

"The conditions he made were too hard. I should have had to bring up my children as Protestants." She spoke very calmly.

"What difference would that have made? We're all Protestants except yourself. I always thought it very narrow-minded of Aunt Hope to insist upon bringing you up in the errors of Rome!"

"Well, you see, I was too much attached to the 'errors of Rome,' as you call them, to deprive my child of its spiritual inheritance."

"But this secret ceremony—was *that* in a Catholic church?"

"No. That was where I did wrong. Oh, I know I was duped and deceived, but I was in the wrong, too. I disobeyed . . . And I've been punished, Matthew—very heavily and bitterly punished. I've suffered for it." She looked at him with her clear, tranquil gaze. "Those months before Hilary was born . . . I was abroad in Italy, and I nearly died. I should have died, I think, if it hadn't been for Rebecca. We lived for the most part in quiet little towns where there were hardly any English and it was very cheap."

"It's most unfortunate that you should be saddled with this child! Otherwise you could have gone back to your maiden name, and no one would have been any the wiser."

She laughed. "But I wouldn't be without Hilary for all the world!"

"She complicates everything. And when she grows older you'll have to tell her. If she wants to marry, for instance—it wouldn't be fair to the man not to tell him." Matthew spoke with a certain indignation.

"I suppose not," said Viola, wearily.

"If you'd asked my advice I should have urged you for your own sake to hide her. You could easily have found someone to adopt her!"

"I felt at all costs—even at the cost of my good name and hers—I must keep Hilary in my own hands;—give her the same Faith, the same gift, that I had had myself. It was her birthright."

"It seems to me against all religion not to marry a man when you're going to have his child," said Matthew, crudely.

"Well, it depends. We Catholics put our Faith first . . ."

Her own child . . . When Viola thought of

Hilary, her heart softened and all its hard and bitter places seemed to melt and break up. Long ago she had resolved that all the happiness and freedom that had been so lacking in her own childhood should belong to her daughter, together with those spiritual gifts which had been hers for so many years. She was glad that she had this eternal heritage to bestow upon her baby. She remembered the joy with which she had seen her being baptized in the old Baptistery at Florence, for it was in the City of Flowers, almost under the shadow of Brunelleschi's ruby-colored Dome, that her baby had come into the world. Her one fear had been that she herself would die and leave Hilary to be brought up by strangers even as she had been. She had wanted a little girl. Since the child's birth she had been very calm and happy. It was only before, that she had known strange moments of terror and apprehension. But she had long ago been to Confession, had made her peace with the Church, had savored the grace of pardon and absolution. It had helped her to look upon life with new eyes. She resolved that never again would she forfeit the Divine friendship. She would ever go softly in remembrance of those days when she had strayed beyond the Fold.

All through her months of waiting, her cruelly sharp illness, Rebecca had tended her like a child. She had learned to love the grim, harsh-visaged maid almost with tenderness. And when at last funds ran low, Viola had resolved to take her courage in both hands and go out to Ceylon.

"Well, I'm very sorry for you, Viola, very sorry indeed," said Matthew. "It seems to me that, as the saying goes, you've been more sinned against than sinning, and you were a little fool not to marry the man if you had half a chance of doing so. It's too late now you've got that brat on your hands, unless of course you were to hide her away. To

think you're not yet twenty, and that you should have made this unholy mess of your life! But I simply can't keep you here. It's a rough bachelor domain and you'd be sick to death of it in a month. And it's jolly uncomfortable. And with a child it's impossible. What would you do if your baby was taken ill? There isn't a doctor within twenty miles. And I've no neighbors except Keane. But I'll tell you what I'll do, Viola—I'll send you home. I can pay your passage. I'll take you down to Colombo and see you off. Only, you can't stay here. It's a very small world, and people will naturally ask questions. You're too young . . . And though I'm not a society man, I'm respected in Ceylon. And you—you've dragged our name in the mud. No, I couldn't have you. People have a way of finding out about things."

This was probably one of the longest speeches Matthew Hudson had ever made in his life, and it was certainly one of the most vehement and sincere. He had a terror of other people's tongues, and a morbid fear of adverse criticism. And Viola by reason of her youth and beauty was bound to attract attention. Men would come from far and near, on one pretext or another, to see "old Hudson's" pretty sister.

"Matthew, you mustn't send me away. I can't go back to England and I haven't any home. Let me stay just for a few months. I need peace—" Her face was very white. "It's so dreadful to wander about the world with a little baby."

"You've brought it on yourself," he stormed. "You should have told Percival you were going to get married and asked his advice. When a man wants to keep his marriage such a secret as that, you may depend there's something wrong. Bigamy if not worse. And you knew you were doing wrong—you said so. You did it with your eyes open. But

you mustn't expect me to be bothered with your brat!"

He looked at her with a kind of veiled hostility. He had an idea that she was the kind of woman who made slaves of men. And he was not going to be her slave. Although she was his sister, she was almost a stranger to him. He didn't know her. He didn't want her. She'd no right to come here, whining for charity. He did not feel the slightest affection for her. And he remembered someone had said Aunt Hope had called her a troublesome child . . .

Viola's eyes flashed.

"Matthew, I don't mind you're behaving inhumanly to me, but I'm not going to let you turn Hilary adrift. We're going to stop here for the present, and I promise to annoy you as little as possible. We shan't be any expense to you. I've got three hundred a year now and I shall have four when I come of age." She spoke with a spirited determination that had a visible effect upon him.

He was silent. He knew that he couldn't turn her out unless he used physical violence, and what a story that would make. In Ceylon there was no possibility of secret action. Everyone knew everyone else's business.

"Only for the present, then," he said at last. "Until you can make other plans."

Viola went up to him and kissed his forehead. There was something fearless in the little action, for she was perfectly aware that he would not hesitate to repulse her brutally if the impulse should so seize him. But he did not move, he was far too much taken aback. He could not remember that any woman had kissed him since he had arrived at man's estate.

"Thank you, Matthew," she whispered. "I'm frightfully grateful. But I didn't really think you'd

let me down. It's most awfully good of you not to turn us out."

"It's only for the moment. I can't keep you here very long."

But Viola had learned to live in the present, and she felt that she had been granted an indefinite respite. For perhaps months to come she would have shelter, a roof, food, for herself and Hilary.

She went into the bungalow and down the passage that led from the dining-room; he could hear her footsteps fading away in the distance. She had gone to Hilary.

"Well, it's beastly bad luck on her, anyway," he thought. "And a child, too." It seemed as if he were trying to excuse his own weakness to himself.

But the question of the money had decided him to keep them for the present. Matthew was close, and this addition to the household income would be very valuable. Even if she only gave him two hundred and fifty pounds a year, that would more than pay her expenses, with the rupee at its present value. She could keep fifty for her clothes and out-of-pocket expenses, and for Hilary. And he would insist in return that she should lead a quiet life, not rushing about and visiting neighbors or inviting people to the bungalow.

He hadn't much confidence in her wisdom or sagacity, but she had had a pretty stiff lesson, and he could only hope that she had profited by it.

CHAPTER III

VIOLA sat for a long time that night by Hilary's side. The child was lying on the wide bed under the mosquito-netting, sleeping very quietly.

Strange, unaccustomed sounds reached Viola's

ears across the peculiar stillness of the night. The rasping, grating noise made by the insect known as the scissor-grinder, the haunting cry of a screech-owl, the savage barking of the jackals, and at the back of it all the faint rhythmic measure of tomtoms that were being played down in the coolie lines half a mile away.

But within the bungalow everything was perfectly still. The murmur of the servants' voices, perhaps discussing the unusual happenings of the day, had ceased at last.

Viola remembered the apparently endless tracts of jungle through which she had been carried to reach Kellioya, and she realized how far away she was, how remote, from the outside world. Yet Matthew had lived here for nearly twenty years. He was never happy away from this lonely spot. It offered him all that he desired.

All through the past months the thought of Kellioya had attracted Viola. It was a new world, and though she was not tired of the old one, she had grown to be mortally afraid of it. That fear of recognition, of explanation, of discovery, had haunted her, and made her roam restlessly through Italy, France and Switzerland. She had never set foot in England since the day of her hasty flight from her brother's house with Rebecca. She could not meet the pitying, curious, perhaps condemnatory eyes.

When she thought of Esmé now, it was without bitterness. He was simply the man who had cruelly tricked her and then cast her off, unable to make sacrifices for her, offering her conditions that were impossible for her to accept. He loved her, she didn't doubt that, but he had always been incapable of facing poverty for her sake. She did not ask herself whether he still loved her in that strange egoistic fashion of his; whether he were happy or unhappy,

now that he had definitely lost her. She didn't care. She didn't love him. But once she had loved him, with a trembling worship such as perhaps a woman feels once and for one only, and there were things even now of which she dared not think lest an emotion deeper than sorrow, stronger than anger, should invade her heart. She was thankful, at such times, to feel that she was securely hidden from Esmé; that it was almost impossible they should ever meet again.

But she remembered him when little Hilary looked at her with Esmé's eyes—those clear green eyes, wide apart, wide open. Yes, there would always be Hilary to prevent her from forgetting Esmé.

Mr. Keane walked over to Kellioya on the following afternoon, to call upon Hudson's sister, as he inwardly called her. He expected to find a plain woman of the massive type, no longer very young, a kind of Matthew in petticoats, so that surprise awaited him.

He was an elderly man, well on in his forties but looking even more. His hair and beard were grizzled, and he was growing stout, as men do in the tropics unless they become thin to emaciation. He was a widower, with a couple of sons at school in England. He was very well known and greatly respected in Ceylon, and, having some private means, was reputed to be wealthy. His generosity supported this view.

When Matthew saw him advancing across the grass, he thought:

"He's coming to have a look at Viola."

The thought annoyed him intensely. Keane was a man who frequently visited friends in other districts; he attended most of the up-country race-meetings; he was acquainted with all the gossip of

Ceylon, and thus he rendered his exile as little irksome as possible. He would often ride up to Nuwara Eliya for a few days, or spend a week in Colombo, where he had hosts of friends among the government officials and rich merchants. He was very popular, and had an easy charm of manner. People sometimes wondered why he had never married again. His wife had been dead some years.

Keane would be certain to tell the whole little world of Ceylon how beautiful "old Hudson's sister" was. The thought was intolerable to Matthew. He wished it had been possible to keep her out of sight.

All day he had been calling himself a fool for permitting her to stop. But it was too late now to go back on his word, and then the prospect of acquiring most of her income was a very strong incentive to Matthew for keeping her at Kellioya. But she was very exacting, and he found himself constantly obeying and submitting, and carrying out her orders, just as if she were the owner of the bungalow. Not that she wanted anything for herself, but she was singularly determined that Hilary should have everything that was necessary for her age. The carpenter had put important work aside in order to make the child a crib without delay. Pillows were being undone to be re-fashioned into a little mattress. Some of the worn sheets had been cut up by Rebecca into smaller ones for the little cot. It seemed to Matthew that Viola had taken complete possession of the bungalow.

"Hullo, Hudson—I hear you're quite a family party here," said Keane's agreeable cheery voice. Naturally of a friendly, hospitable disposition, he was little able to understand his neighbor's curious preference for a lonely, penurious life. And it wasn't as if Hudson was really poor or had a family

for whom it was necessary to save; on the contrary, he was locally supposed to have made his "bit."

"My sister, Mrs. Mansfield, has arrived, if you mean that," said Matthew, rather stiffly.

"You've kept it pretty dark," smiled Keane, walking into the veranda and throwing himself upon a roomy wicker-chair piled with cushions in red cotton covers. He had had a long walk; the afternoon was hot; he hoped that soon he would at least be offered a cup of good strong Kellioya tea.

At that moment Viola appeared through the drawing-room window. Keane's first impression of her was that this couldn't possibly be Mrs. Mansfield, but a young girl who had accompanied her. She looked perhaps about seventeen years old, and she was tall, slender, dark-haired and very lovely. But when he rose and held out his hand and saw her face more closely, he perceived that though young her expression was mature and that her eyes must have looked upon suffering. They were wonderful eyes—dark, poetical, dreamy. One did not readily associate such beauty, such delicate grace, with Matthew Hudson's relations.

"My sister, Mrs. Mansfield," murmured Matthew. "Viola—this is my nearest neighbor, Mr. Keane."

"Delighted to meet you, Mrs. Mansfield," said Keane, heartily. "It is very brave of you to come out to Kellioya—ladies don't often venture so far unless of course their husbands live hereabouts. We're a very unsociable lot, principally because our bungalows are so far apart, and we've hardly any young people to keep us alive. I'm afraid you'll find it dull. But Hudson must bring you over to my place one day. Do you ride? It's quite a pleasant ride along the river."

"Thanks very much—I can ride, and I should love to come," said Viola.

"I could send my pony over for you if you haven't anything of your own."

"I'm afraid my sister still has to learn that I'm a very unsociable man, who never pays visits if he can help it," said Hudson, ungraciously.

He stood there, massive, bulky, the picture of rough strength, a Titan of a man.

"Oh, but Mrs. Mansfield must cure you of these misanthropic ways," said Keane, smiling.

"No, she won't. She's got to live my life. And if she doesn't like it she can go away," said Matthew.

His speech produced an astonished silence. His manner had been both rude and abrupt and disagreeable. Viola crimsoned, and Keane, picking up an English illustrated paper, glanced perfunctorily at its contents.

What must Mrs. Mansfield think of this great hulking boor of a man?

"Poor Matthew," said Viola, at last, "it's very good of him to have us. I do feel it's hard enough to have three people descending upon him as we did yesterday. So the least we can do is to be very good and give as little trouble as possible."

"Three people?" said Keane.

"Yes—I brought my baby and her nurse."

"How old's your baby?" asked Keane. It was difficult to believe this young creature should already have savored maternal cares. She must have married unusually young. But he knew nothing of her—he did not remember even to have heard of her existence until Matthew's note had reached him yesterday.

"She's such a darling, you must see her presently," said Viola. "Is the climate here good for children?"

"Good enough. I kept my two boys out here until they were seven and eight. I only sent them home then because I felt the elder one ought to go to

school, and they were so devoted I couldn't separate them. But a girl could stay much longer—you can teach a girl yourself or get a governess for her."

"Oh, I could teach her. I used to teach my brother's children in London," said Viola, looking relieved.

Keane glanced at her. Yes, but what about herself? Kellioya was a very lonely place for a young and beautiful woman to spend her youth in. Had she been there with her husband, that would have altered matters. Keane's own wife had loved Kuduwatte, every stick and stone of it; she had made a beautiful home there for himself and their two children. But to live here, miles and miles from a cart-road or a town, with a cross-grained old curmudgeon like Hudson! . . .

The odd thing was, though, that she didn't seem to be thinking of herself at all. All her thoughts were centered upon her child and its welfare. Was life, in its active, emotional phases already past for her? Impossible . . . Even supposing she were a widow, she would surely marry again. She didn't look like a widow either, in that white dress with the jade beads at her throat.

"You must show me your little girl," he said, kindly. "I know quite a lot about babies. But ours were both boys."

"I'll go and see if she's awake," said Viola, glad of an excuse to fetch Hilary.

When she had gone, Matthew observed gruffly: "You must excuse my sister—she's quite cracked about that brat of hers."

"Oh, but I like to see a woman—a young woman, too—wrapped up in her kiddies," said Keane.

Matthew hesitated and then said: "I must tell you this in confidence, Keane. My sister is separated from her husband. A miserable little story—she was young and very imprudent. If you hear any

gossip you can just say that . . . and that I told you."

Keane was immensely interested. He had felt certain that there must be some kind of story to account for Viola's sudden appearance at Kellioya.

"She won't stay here long," he pronounced, confidently; "it isn't the right place for anyone so young."

"And I've no accommodation for such a large party. If she'd consulted me in time, I should have urged her not to come at all."

So her arrival had been, even as Keane had begun to suspect, entirely unexpected.

"She might get a divorce and marry again," he suggested.

"Oh, she couldn't do that in any case. She's been brought up a Roman Catholic. When she was a little child she went to live with an aunt who was a fanatical Roman."

"Oh," said Keane.

Viola reappeared, carrying Hilary in her arms. She carried her in the loose, easy fashion that had always struck Matthew as so dangerous. The child was awake and their two faces were pressed together.

"What queer green eyes," said Keane. "I don't think I ever saw eyes quite that color before."

"Perhaps they'll change," said Viola. "Babies' eyes often change, you know." Her dark hair looked darker than ever against Hilary's curly locks of silver-flax. "And they're very sweet, aren't they, with their long lashes?"

Matthew watched his sister. How she adored Hilary! . . . It was just as if she had no room in her life for anything else. She didn't care where she was as long as she could have her baby with her.

"She's a lovely little thing," said Keane, admiringly.

"Yes, isn't she?" said Viola. "And she's so intelligent. I'm always expecting her to begin to talk, but I suppose it's too soon yet. You see, I've absolutely no experience of babies, and I never knew they could be so—so wonderful!"

She made such a pretty picture sitting there with Hilary on her knee, that Keane could hardly take his eyes from her. Matthew had told him a little, a very little, of her story, and it was a sorrowful one. She must have known great unhappiness and misery, and perhaps Kellioya would give her just the things she needed, peace, and sunshine, and solitude.

"By the way, Madura's sold," he said, suddenly. "Old Deepham isn't coming back, and it seems that Sir Garth Bennet has bought it. They say he means to plant rubber. He's a youngish chap, you know—he was in Ceylon last winter, and stayed with me for a few days—he's lost his wife and was rather down in the mouth. There's one child—a boy, I believe—but he's to be left at home with old Lady Bennet."

It was extraordinary, Matthew thought, how Keane managed to pick up so much information about people who were comparative strangers.

"Rubber!" he said with contempt, "he must have more money than brains."

"Well, he thinks there's a future for it," said Keane.

It was before the days of motor-cars, and the uses of india-rubber were far more restricted than at the present time.

"He declares that people will make bigger fortunes out of it than they ever did out of coffee or tea," continued Keane.

"Well, let him ruin himself in his own way," said Hudson, genially. "When's he coming?"

"Next month, I believe. I've told him I'll put him up till he can get the place habitable. You know, Deepham had let things go to pieces latterly.

The bungalow's in an awful state, and Bennet will have to build new lines for the coolies."

Deephams had been a hermit after Hudson's own heart. He had, however, spent his solitude in drinking deeply, leaving things on the estate to go to rack and ruin, in a country, too, where Nature aids and abets such indifference in the work of destruction. Now he had gone home, ruined in all probability, broken in health and fortune. And this young chap was coming out full of fine new ideas about pulling the place together. Rubber, indeed! Matthew could hardly conceal his contempt for that commodity. Now if it had only been something to eat or drink, he reflected, that would have been another matter.

After tea the two men sat smoking in the veranda. They could see Viola wandering about the garden with Hilary in her arms. It was nearing the hour of sunset, and she wanted to see again that amazing, brilliant pageant of which she had caught glimpses on her journey yesterday. A cool, delicious air was flowing in from the mountains, full of fragrance and scent.

Viola said to herself: "He hates my being here. He wants me to go away . . . He'll try to make it impossible for me to stop."

Yes, he was a big, rough bully of a man. Long solitude had made him coarse, ill-mannered, ferocious. Very different from Percival and George, yet possessing something that they altogether lacked—a queer elemental strength that was not unattractive. It put him, in a sense, above them. They seemed by comparison little men with narrow and conventional views.

But she liked Mr. Keane. She felt that he had been charming and sympathetic about Hilary.

In the veranda Keane said, between the puffs of his beloved pipe: "Kellioya's becoming quite fash-

ionable. If they'd only push the railway up as they're always talking of doing!"

"God forbid!" said Hudson, with unusual piety.

"Well, it would be the making of us all. Our land would treble its value. And even if we didn't want to sell, it would be far more convenient for our produce."

"I'm perfectly contented now," said Hudson. "I hate changes. I shouldn't stay here another day if the railway came up that valley. People would be building bungalows and letting them to the Colombo families in the spring as they do in Nuwara Eliya. We should be having tennis-clubs, dancing, races and all the rest of it!"

"So much the better," said Keane. "I've always hoped they might develop the district a bit before my boys are old enough to come out. It's all very well for us old fogies, but for the young! I'm afraid David wouldn't stick it for six months."

David was his elder son.

"You'd much better teach him to work hard and not gad about," said Hudson, surlily. "I have to be pretty strict myself with that young fool Brett. He'd be off to Kandy or Colombo every month if I let him, squandering his substance."

Keane emptied the ashes from his pipe. Then he said slowly, "I've been wanting to speak to you about young Brett, Hudson."

Brett was an assistant (a "creeper" or "S. D." in Ceylon parlance), who in consideration of a premium resided on Hudson's estate and learned the mysteries of tea-planting under his ægis. He lived a sufficiently lonely life for a lad of twenty-two, in a small bungalow down by the river.

"You can't tell me anything I don't know about him," said Hudson, roughly. His voice was raised and defiant.

"That boy's doing no good out here," said Keane,

in his well-bred measured tones. "He's too lonely, and he's drinking much more than's good for him. You oughtn't to let him stay unless you can have him to live here with you, and keep your eye on him. He's very young, and he's a nice boy—I don't like to see him going to the bad. I've thought once or twice of writing to his mother."

"He's a consummate young fool," said Matthew, "and I'm looking after him quite as much as I can. You'd better not interfere between me and my assistant, Keane," he added.

"Well, I'm not going to let him ruin himself in front of my eyes, Hudson," said Keane, imperturbably. "I suppose they're paying a pretty stiff premium?"

"None too much," said Hudson, "considering he doesn't do a stroke of work."

The subject of young Brett was distasteful to him. He had only consented to take a pupil at all in consideration of the very favorable terms proposed. But the boy, who had been there now about nine months, was idle and unsatisfactory. It was no business, however, of Keane's—a gossip if ever there was one!

He was glad when Keane rose to go. This man voiced public opinion to a very great extent, he was universally liked and respected; he was always ready to hold out a helping hand to those less fortunate than himself. Matthew could not deny him a certain unwilling admiration and respect. But he couldn't have him interfering. He would speak to young Brett, and give him a good talking-to. The boy was idle and lonely, there was really nothing else the matter.

As they walked across the garden, they met Viola carrying Hilary. She made a pretty picture standing there in the lengthening shadows with the child in her arms.

Keane said good-by to her, and as he walked homeward, following the footpath that led across the neat, prim tea-plantations, he said to himself:

"So that's the mysterious Mrs. Mansfield. I wonder what she'll make of old Matthew?"

CHAPTER IV

MATTHEW'S secret passion was money. He had the miser's nature, and loved his money far more than anything it could conceivably buy. For upward of eighteen years he had been living penuriously, frugally, in order that he might save every rupee that he could. He had bought Kellioya with his own small inheritance soon after the coffee crash in the late 'seventies when land was cheap; and he had planted it up with tea as many others at that time were beginning to do. Some of his earnings he had invested in gilt-edged securities in England, and characteristically he never touched the interest of this money.

Viola was shocked at his stained worn clothes, his patched shabby boots. Once she said something about it, but he was angry and told her not to make personal remarks. His red-brown eyes glinted under the shaggy prominent brows with a look of which she was already beginning to be a little afraid.

He wrote to Percival soon after Viola's arrival, requesting him to send a detailed account of her income. Percival had changed some of her investments, and the income already stood at a higher figure. She wasn't entitled to the whole of it until she came of age, but in consideration of her misfortunes and of her having a child to support, he was willing to let her have it all now. It amounted to

just four hundred a year. Until she came of age Percival held the capital in his own hands. Viola would have been a far richer woman, he explained, if she had only behaved sensibly and accepted an income from her child's father, a thing which she had altogether declined to do.

He added that he was glad to think she had found a home with Matthew. They had had no news of her for many months until the receipt of his letter.

Matthew read the letter carefully, two or three times. Four hundred a year. He had had no idea that Aunt Hope had been able to do so much for his sister. Jolly lucky thing that they had consented to her adopting her, even though it had involved bringing Viola up as a Catholic and so preventing her from behaving like ordinary sensible folk.

Four hundred a year. He worked it out rapidly in rupees. The rupee was then at a low value, and Viola would gain enormously upon the exchange. Even supposing she kept fifty pounds for her own clothes and Hilary's, that would still leave a substantial sum per annum in his hands. Her keep wouldn't cost all that. Life in Ceylon was cheap, as long as one lived quietly on the estate and didn't gad about to Colombo and Kandy, to race-meetings and dances. And of course the less Viola was seen the better. People would only ask questions. A woman living apart from her husband is ever the quarry of malicious tongues, no matter how innocent she may be. And Viola, alas, wasn't innocent. She had been very greatly to blame for that secret marriage. She had even frankly acknowledged that she had known she was doing wrong. She ought to have consulted Percival.

"I've heard from Percival and he's consented to let you have your full income now," he told her. "It's four hundred a year, and you can keep fifty for yourself and Hilary."

"I can't manage on fifty," she replied, with unusual decision. "You must remember I have to pay Rebecca's wages. I must have a hundred at least." She had discovered by this time Matthew's ruling passion, and was determined not to allow herself and Hilary to be victimized by it. "You can have three hundred a year, Matthew. We shan't cost you that."

In the end he was obliged to consent, though he assured her that he should lose by the arrangement. But in his heart he knew that it would enable him to add something to his slowly-growing store of rupees, and henceforth he became in a measure reconciled to the fact of Viola's presence at Kellioya.

"It's awfully nice of you not to get rid of us," she added, smiling. She had rather expected to be dismissed directly Matthew was assured that she had enough to live upon.

But though Kellioya was an admirable place for a man to make and save money in, and was further noted for its excellent tea, it was a much less favorable spot for the habitation of a young, restless, ambitious woman not yet twenty years of age.

When Viola first arrived in Ceylon she was still numbed by the catastrophe that had befallen her, and her one idea was to hide from curious and prying eyes. She only needed a safe asylum for herself and Hilary.

But this condition of mind was destined to pass as it does with all normal people, who cannot live forever at the height of a grief, sorrow, or misfortune, or even of a pleasurable emotion. There must be a descent to earth, a longing for the good common things of life, with even a renewal of the enjoyment of them.

Thus it was that the loneliness, the absolute sinister solitude of Kellioya began insensibly to affect

her. It was pleasant in fine weather; its arresting loveliness to one unused to the gorgeous grandeur of the tropics was a real joy to her; and even in fine weather it was seldom too hot. But there were monsoon days, when the winds from the four quarters of the world seemed to meet and clamor upon the hills of Kellioya, and the rain hissed down upon the long-parched earth, that made Viola long to lift up her voice with the voices of Nature and shriek aloud. It was the solitude, she told herself, the absence of any companion who spoke her own language, except Matthew and Rebecca. Matthew was seldom in the house; he was either tramping about the estate to inspect the flushing of the tea and to decide which tract should first submit to the process known as plucking, or he was down in the factory, watching the men at work, stemming any tendency to indolence or inattention on the part of Mr. Brett, the conductor, or the coolies. If one passed the factory one could often hear his rough unpleasant voice raised in anger or contempt. And Rebecca was almost always occupied in looking after Hilary. She was at best a silent woman who preferred not to talk, and thus Viola was thrown on her own meager resources. She had few books, and Matthew's were of the most ancient old-fashioned kind, smelling of mold and partially eaten by white ants.

At such times as these—wild fierce days and nights of storm and tempest and rain—Viola had to remind herself diligently of all she owed to Matthew. She had little in common with him. He prided himself upon speaking his mind, and sometimes it seemed to her that he did not wound her with a sword but with some blunt-edged weapon. Her nerves were often rasped by his harsh, loud, dictatorial voice. Yet he had given her a shelter, a refuge, she mustn't forget that. It wasn't so easy

for a woman placed as she was, to find a home. And as long as he consented to keep her at Kellioya, so long would she remain. She had hoped to save a little against the day of departure, but he had allowed no margin for that. She must try and forget that she wasn't yet twenty, and that she was wasting the precious years of her youth here in this remote part of Ceylon, where she seldom saw the face of a white woman except that of the grim faithful Rebecca. There was no possibility of her hearing Mass, as she had soon discovered to her dismay. Sometimes a traveling priest would take Kellioya on his rounds, and there was a tiny disused church not far from Mr. Keane's bungalow, where Mass was said on those occasions. But his visits were few and far between; there were no Catholic families among the European residents for many miles.

"Does the priest stay with you when he comes?" she asked Matthew one day.

"Certainly not. Why should he? I'm not a Catholic. And Keane always puts him up."

"But now I'm here, perhaps you might ask him," she suggested.

She had a great longing to discuss her present situation with a wise understanding priest.

"I shall do nothing of the kind," said Matthew, emphatically.

Viola stood and gazed sometimes at the hills covered with impenetrable jungle that lay between Kellioya and the nearest cart-road—that long stretch of eerie jungle where the wild beasts had their homes, and the gayly-plumaged birds made their nests. It flung its darkness across the hills like a mantle, almost up to the doors of the bungalow on its east side. When she looked at it, at its mystery, its darkness, its impenetrability, she wondered when she would ever traverse it again to return to the

world. She was a prisoner here in Kellioya—Matthew's prisoner.

Even in fine weather this sense of imprisonment did not leave her, for the mountains stood in jealous watchful guard around Kellioya, and it was only from the western side of the house that she could gaze across wide open spaces at the purple mountains lying like islands in seas of delicate turquoise mist, at the rolling brown patanas, the shining glimpses of a river flowing in the valley between deep jungle-clad banks. At sunset the west was brilliant with an almost incredible glory of gold and crimson, of flashing scarlet, and blue that faded to green. The clouds were like floating islands of color traveling upon a sea of flame, gorgeous shapes that melted at last into that fluid gold that flowed over sky and land. But the wonder of it was brief, there was scarcely any interval between light and darkness; night followed hard upon the disappearance of the sun below the horizon. And in fine weather the nights at Kellioya were beautiful too, calm, clear, and cool with a divine freshness of falling dew. Never even in Italy had Viola seen the wide sky so brilliantly patterned with stars, and sometimes the unfamiliar group of the Southern Cross was visible above the pointed gable of the bungalow. The air was alive then with strange winged things, flying foxes and bats, and great moths with flapping wings that were large as birds. In the clumps of bamboos myriads of fireflies flitted like tiny winged jewels. And later on the jungle awoke; its teeming life stole forth, and harsh terrifying sounds emanated from its fastnesses, the growling purr of the cheetah, the bark of jackals, the screech of an owl, the shrill cry of some hunted bird or beast escaping from its pursuer.

Viola used to lie in bed listening to these wild and fierce and melancholy sounds. . . .

There were no seasons at Kellioya except the rainy and the dry, the former fixed by the breaking of the monsoon twice yearly. Then day after day the heavy rain-wet white clouds drooped like tired birds over the mountains, hiding their shapes, and sometimes even swallowing up the wide view to the west. The Kelli-Oya, usually such a tranquil stream falling delicately in spray of crystal light over the great boulders, would be transformed then into a mighty rushing river, fierce, tempestuous, turbulent, dangerous to cross on account of the rapidity of its torrent. And all around the bungalow the rain hissed fiercely in the groves of eucalyptus and palm and keena trees.

But in wet seasons and dry, the mountains kept their guard around and above Kellioya, shutting it away from the outer world.

The only people Matthew ever saw were Mr. Keane and young Brett. The former, divining that he was unwelcome, was not a frequent visitor; and the latter lived a lonely life in his little bungalow near the river, and though he was often at work in the factory, he seldom came to the house. Matthew never invited anyone to breakfast or dinner. He did not encourage these two men to visit him. He kept Viola sedulously under his eye. He was afraid that people would discover her shameful little story. And if a man fell in love with her, he must necessarily, if he wished to marry her, learn the truth.

No—the less she saw of people the better. Already he suspected young Brett of worshiping her from afar. She had really hardly exchanged a dozen words with the boy, for whom, however, she felt a very deep compassion, realizing that his loneliness must be far greater than her own, and was probably mingled, too, with a fierce nostalgia for his English home. But Matthew had seen her

speaking to him one day near the factory and had told her he "couldn't have it." Viola colored with anger, but she said nothing. He had a right to dictate to her. As long as she lived under his roof she must bow her neck to the yoke.

Viola was never one to repine, and she did contrive to squeeze a certain pleasure from the sweet fragrant air, the sunshine, the natural beauties of her surroundings, the flowers and birds, the scenery, the brilliant sub-tropical vegetation. Matthew felt a kind of resentment at seeing her so gay, so girlish, so outwardly happy. To hear her rippling laugh as she played with Hilary on the lawn! Her joyous absorption in Hilary! It was strange, too, that she did not seem to dwell upon that hot-headed, rebellious, imprudent act of hers, which was bound to stain her whole life with its ineradicable smudge of dishonor. Yet she knew she had been in the wrong; she had acknowledged that much, but there was no sign on her part of letting the thought of the past poison her present existence.

Hilary thrived in the bright sunny mountain air. The best milk from Keane's little farm found its way to Kellioya. The child was more than a year old now and was beginning to toddle. She was a slight slim creature who promised to be tall. Already she was self-willed and had a passionate temper. Once Matthew said:

"You're spoiling that brat of yours, Viola. If you don't teach her self-control now, you'll have trouble with her by and by."

"Oh, she's too much of a baby to begin to learn hard lessons."

"Not at all. And you must remember that she has hereditary tendencies. Tendencies to deceit—to self-indulgence—"

Viola grew crimson with indignation, but Matthew pursued his iron way remorselessly.

"It's only kind to put them down with a strong hand."

Viola said passionately: "I won't have her ruled by fear. I remember my own childhood too well. You can't imagine what it was like with Aunt Hope. And yet she was certain she was only doing her duty."

"I expect you were a tiresome child. And it was her nature to be strict."

"Strict? I lived in terror of her!"

"Well, it was very good of her to undertake you at all," said Matthew, with lively recollections of the scene between Mrs. George Hudson and Viola, when the period of severity and discipline was a thing of the past. No doubt she had needed and received correction.

"There was hardly a day—certainly not a week—when I wasn't punished, even cruelly punished. I used to envy other children their happy homes, their freedom, their . . . mothers." Her voice grew soft. Never as long as she lived would she forget that beautiful comforting maternal presence of which she had been deprived so young. "I'm going to give Hilary a happy childhood. And I won't have her frightened."

"Well, when she's older I shall take her in hand myself if it's necessary," said Matthew, grimly.

Viola secretly determined to leave Kellioya before that day came. Her own flesh seemed to fear Matthew then, his rough strength, his bullying ways, his loud threatening voice.

A coolie appeared, approaching the house. From his turban he produced an envelope, which he handed to Hudson with a deep salaam.

Matthew opened it and scanned its contents. "Brett's ill," he said, laconically. Then turning to the man, he said curtly in Tamil: "Tell Brett *durai* I shall be there in half an hour."

"Shall I come with you, Matthew?" said Viola, rising too.

"Come with me? What on earth for?"

"Well, I might be of use."

"What use?" He looked at her with disdain. His glance included her dainty white dress and shoes, her delicate soft hands.

"I could nurse him," she said, simply. "I know what to do when people are ill. When you've a child of your own you learn all that."

"In this country we men are accustomed to looking after each other. And we manage wonderfully well, considering."

"Poor boy—I'm sorry he's ill," said Viola.

It was ridiculous of her to adopt that maternal pose, thought Matthew, for Brett was at least two years her senior. Of course he looked a mere boy, short, slight, undeveloped, insignificant. Quite ready too to fall in love with Viola—already he was inclined to regard her with a shy boyish worship. And he had kept pretty straight these last months—that was her influence no doubt. Hers and Keane's. He wondered if Keane knew that Brett was ill. But Keane was busy, for he had Sir Garth Bennet staying with him now, and was helping him to settle in to the big tumbledown bungalow at Madura.

Matthew put on his solar topee, for the sun was still very hot, and strode away across the tea-plantation. As he went he stopped from time to time to examine the state of the crops. The rain last week had brought everything on wonderfully. "There's a decent flush there . . . I'll have that plucked next week," he said aloud, taking the new little growth, bright green and very limp and fragile, between his thumb and finger. And then presently: "There—they haven't touched that hill yet and I told Brett to begin two days ago. Idle young beggar—I believe his mistakes cost me more than the

money he pays for being allowed to make them. He'll never be any good." Musing thus, he arrived at the little bungalow more than a mile away where Brett lived.

The forlorn little habitation stood too close to the river. Since the rain of two days back, the Kelli-Oya had risen considerably, and was still racing with turbulent strength over rocks and boulders, flinging lovely showers of silver spray to the blue sky. Along its banks the jungle grew thickly; and a group of great dark keena-trees bent over it and were washed by the high-flung spray. Here and there a crimson rhododendron showed its patch of flame. Within a few yards of the house an insubstantial wooden bridge spanned the river in case of necessity, for the Kelli-Oya was easily fordable in fine weather.

Matthew walked along the veranda to the room where Brett slept. The wooden shutters were closed across the window. He tapped upon them with his stick.

"Are you there, Brett? It's Hudson."

"Please go round by the kitchen," gasped a weak voice from within.

Matthew threaded his way through the back regions and from thence into the bungalow. He entered the boy's room. It was quite dark, and he went across to the window and opened the shutters a little so that he could obtain a glimpse of the figure lying on the bed, prone and inert under the discolored mosquito-netting.

"Never saw anything like you young fellows for giving in every time you think you've got a finger ache," he grumbled.

Like all very strong powerful men he had a secret contempt for illness, and always imagined it was the result of some imprudence on the part of the patient.

Hartley Brett's head was raised slightly on the

pillows; his face was white; he seemed to be gasping for breath.

"I think I'm done for," he said, with a sickly smile.

"Rot, man! You've probably got a chill and a touch of malaria. Some d——d imprudence, I suppose! Taken your temperature?"

"Haven't got such a thing as a thermometer," gasped the boy.

Matthew produced one from his pocket and thrust it into Brett's mouth.

"Now hold your tongue for a few minutes!"

Hartley Brett took the thermometer from his mouth, said hurriedly, "I wish you'd remember I'm not a coolie, Mr. Hudson," and replaced it.

"You're not half as much use as one," replied Matthew, hunching his great shoulders and sitting in a rickety chair by the window.

The room was very hot. In the silence there could be heard the faint sustained humming of innumerable mosquitoes.

Presently he rose, took the thermometer from Brett's mouth, and carried it to the window.

"Whewww," he whistled, under his breath. But Hartley Brett caught the sound.

"Is it so very high? I told you I was done for . . ."

"It's high enough. If you're not better to-morrow I shall have to ship you off to Nuwara Eliya."

The big man looked down at the small boyish form on the bed. The mosquito-netting made a slight veil but he could still see very plainly the pallor, the emaciation, the brilliant feverish eyes. He thrust in his hand and laid it on the boy's brow.

"I know what you're thinking," said the weak

high voice, "but it isn't that. Honestly it isn't. I haven't touched a drop of anything for weeks. Ever since Mrs. Mansfield . . ." He stopped.

Matthew's face hardened. "What has my sister got to do with it?"

"She didn't say much, but she was awfully, awfully kind. She's wonderful, isn't she? She understood how lonely it was for me here—she was sorry for me." His pale shining eyes were fixed upon Matthew, and the weak soft mouth twitched.

"Well, I'm glad she helped you. But you oughtn't to be such a young ass as to *want* a woman's help," said Hudson, scornfully.

"I wish she'd come," said Hartley, "I don't like lying here alone, thinking I might go out at any moment. The man's gone off somewhere to worship his gods, and there's no one but the kitchen coolie."

Matthew relented a little, partly because the high temperature had startled him, and partly because there was something about the look of Brett which he didn't quite like. He had had a good deal of experience of illness in a land where death generally comes very suddenly when it does come, and he was accustomed to administer a rough and ready medical attention to his sick coolies, who had a profound faith in the ability of their white master to heal.

"Well, I'll see about it," he said; "it may be too late for her to come to-night, but perhaps she could look in, in the morning."

Brett closed his eyes, and a look of quiet content came into his worn young face. He was an only son, and he missed his mother, who had fussed over him and adored him all his life. He had been sent out to Ceylon to learn tea-planting because an old uncle of his had interests in the island, and it was

hoped that if he showed any ability he might hereafter be employed in looking after them.

A weak invertebrate creature, thought Matthew, ready to give in at the first symptom of illness. Too young to take care of himself. And perhaps he was missing the stimulant he had so drastically knocked off, because of something Viola had said to him. Matthew had nothing but contempt for a man who permitted himself to be influenced by a woman. A woman in his eyes was little better than a child, and wanted nearly as much discipline.

He stayed with Brett until Keane arrived, after a busy day spent over at Madura. Keane was accompanied by a servant, who brought various nourishing things in a basket. There was some fruit, soda-water, jelly and milk. His curiously gentle presence in the sick-room made a strange contrast to Hudson's rough methods, and yet it was Matthew who had brought a gleam of hope and happiness back to the sick boy. The blessed knowledge that on the morrow perhaps Mrs. Mansfield would come! . . .

As Matthew approached the bungalow on his return, he saw Viola standing on the path at the foot of the steps. Her white figure detached itself from the dusky background of green. A spray of scarlet geranium touched her skirt with a vivid blot of color. It struck Matthew that she was waiting for him, anxious perhaps to hear what news he should bring of Hartley Brett. Again his suspicions were aroused. There was evidently a friendliness between them of which he knew nothing. When had she found an opportunity of speaking to him? And he was asking for her. Would it be wise to let her go? Wouldn't it be better to ship him off to Nuwara Eliya, where he would have good nursing, a doctor's advice?

"Well?" said Viola.

"He's pretty bad. High fever and such a pulse! And he thinks he's done for. But they always do—these weedy little chaps with the physique of a rat."

Her face grew grave. "Poor boy. I think I'd really better go to him, Matthew. He oughtn't to be left with just his native servants. You know how difficult it is to wake them when anything's wanted. And I could sit up with him."

"I really believe you'd better," said Hudson. "Of course in a way I'm responsible." Then he added abruptly: "Don't be too soft with him. The young fool's in love with you, as it is!"

She looked at him sharply. "In love with me? What utter nonsense, Matthew!"

"Oh, don't pretend you don't know!" he flung at her in an exasperated tone.

She gave him a quick startled look, then she turned and went indoors. She wasn't going to give him time to change his mind. She meant to go to young Brett at once. She rightly guessed that he must be very ill indeed or Matthew would never have given his consent. But of course it would look better, supposing anything happened, if he could tell Mrs. Brett that he had done all he could—his sister, Mrs. Mansfield, had nursed her son. He had had every care. . . . But alas, the care should have been given long ago. The boy was too young, too utterly inexperienced to look after himself.

"Rebecca, you must have Hilary to-night. Put her crib in your room. I'm going over to nurse Mr. Brett, he's very ill."

"Couldn't I go instead, ma'am?" asked Rebecca.

"No—it seems he asked for me. I'd better take a hot bottle—a spirit lamp—just a few things. You must help me to put them together."

As she made ready for the little expedition she remembered that this would be the first night she had ever spent away from Hilary since the child's birth.

CHAPTER V

WHEN she was ready, Viola returned to the veranda. Matthew was waiting for her. It was a lovely evening with the prospect of a brilliant sunset. Already a golden light was flowing over the jungle, weaving wonderful patterns upon its monotonous gray-green darkness.

"I'll walk with you," said Hudson. He was still feeling exceedingly uneasy, and did not wish to be left alone with his own thoughts.

As usual he walked on ahead of her, kicking at the shining bits of quartz with which the pathway was strewn. When the sun touched them they gleamed like diamonds.

As the brother and sister walked on, the blue dusk deepened about them. They had to descend into a valley to reach the bungalow, and in this narrow gorge the sun's rays had already ceased to penetrate and a sense of chill prevailed. A certain dampness came up from the river, and twisted below them like a pale scarf of mist. The moon showed above a group of darkly etched keena-trees whose soft pine-like foliage was brushed delicately against the sky. In the distance the liquid murmur of the frogs' chorus sounded its strange monotonous melody.

As they approached Brett's bungalow they saw two figures standing in the veranda. One of them was Keane. He came quickly toward them, greeted Hudson, and held out his hand to Viola.

"It's most awfully good of you to come, Mrs. Mansfield."

Behind him stood a young man, dark, thin, pale, with haggard eyes.

"I want to introduce Sir Garth Bennet to you," added Keane, indicating this second figure.

Garth Bennet came down the steps of the veranda and shook hands with the brother and sister. From his great height he looked down upon Viola. What an apparition in this remote, desolate district! Mrs. Mansfield . . . Keane had spoken of her sometimes, but he had not been prepared to find anyone so youthful. She looked a mere slip of a girl in that white muslin dress that hung so limply about her figure.

"How is he, Mr. Keane?" Viola asked.

"Well, I'm afraid he's pretty bad. Doesn't always know what he's saying. But there's often delirium with that very high fever."

All this time Garth was silent. It seemed incredible, so ran his thoughts, that Mrs. Mansfield could really be the sister of that great hulking brute, Hudson. Why did she live with him? Was she happy at Kellioya, shut away from all the world? Keane had spoken of a child, but he hadn't paid much attention. He must ask him to tell him more about her, and find out why she was living at Kellioya.

Viola went along the veranda into Brett's room accompanied by Matthew. When they had disappeared Garth turned to Keane.

"What a perfectly lovely face!" he said, carelessly. "Is she a widow?"

"No—separated from her husband. But Hudson's a very close chap—I don't know any details."

"Didn't you say there was a child? She looks most awfully young."

"She isn't twenty or only just. But her little girl is already more than a year old."

"I wonder why she lives here?"

"I've wondered too."

"Perhaps," said Garth, cautiously, "she wants to hide."

"That may be. But I doubt it."

"No one would find her here," said Garth, in his melancholy voice. He had been very unhappy since the death of his young wife.

Keane echoed: "No one."

Garth lit a cigarette. Presently he said: "You didn't prepare me for anything quite so dazzling." He gave an embarrassed laugh.

"I didn't try to prepare you," said Keane, frankly. "Old Hudson's a queer cross-grained curmudgeon, and he won't even let people see her if he can help it."

"Well, I intend to see her," said Garth, calmly.

"You'll have no end of a row with Hudson if you do try to," said Keane, in a grave warning tone.

"Why doesn't she get a divorce?"

"Can't. She's a Catholic."

"A Catholic?"

"Yes."

"But Hudson isn't, is he? Or perhaps her husband—?"

"No—I don't think she became one on her marriage. She was adopted by a fanatical aunt, so the story goes, who insisted upon bringing her up a Roman."

"Is the child like her?"

"Not a bit! But it's the darlingest little thing. Mrs. Mansfield adores it. It's quite pretty to see them together, but unfortunately it's difficult to obtain a glimpse."

Garth Bennet flung away his cigarette.

"How unfair," he said. "Unfair in every way. First that she should be buried alive at Kellioya, and secondly that she shouldn't be able to get a divorce and marry again."

"Perhaps she doesn't want to. I think myself there must be a sad story behind it all," said Keane.

"She doesn't look exactly sad," said Bennet.

He felt injured because Keane had not prepared

him for this unusual vision of youth and beauty, or he would certainly have made a point of calling at Kellioya. Of Matthew Hudson he had heard nothing pleasant, and had therefore felt that the pleasure of making his acquaintance could usefully be postponed.

When Hudson emerged from the sick-room dusk had fallen, and the fireflies were illuminating with myriads of tiny lamps the great clump of bamboos outside. The three men sat smoking almost in silence. They could hear the voice of the river as it dashed turbulently along its rocky course; the croaking of the vast army of frogs, the sound, shrill and rasping, of the "scissor-grinder." Flying foxes flew past, and sometimes a great moth flapped its wide wings as it came toward the light that showed from the bungalow.

"My sister's going to stay here to-night," said Matthew, at last. "He must have someone—he can't be left. If he got delirious he might hurt himself."

"But she won't be alone with him?" inquired Garth, speaking to Matthew for the first time.

"No—I shall sleep here. She'll call me if she wants help. I shall stay till it's time to go back to muster."

"And what time's that?" Garth asked.

"Six," said Matthew, laconically. He wondered idly why Garth Bennet was questioning him so closely. "I shall have to leave at half past five," he added.

"Hartley ought to go home," said Keane, suddenly. "I've thought so for a long time past. I know he's made great efforts to keep steady lately, but the life here isn't fit for a young boy. He's backward and undeveloped for his age. It's a pity they ever sent him out."

"I don't agree with you," said Matthew, "there's no reason why he shouldn't have turned out an efficient planter if he'd been steady and stuck to his job."

"Well, apparently that's just what he couldn't do," said Keane, "and I hope his mother will send for him. He ought to go home after a bout of this kind."

"Oh, a few weeks in Nuwara Eliya will set him up," said Matthew, confidently.

"Well, Bennet, we must be pushing off," said Keane, rising. "I'll look in some time to-morrow and see how he's getting on, and relieve your sister from her watch. We mustn't let her wear herself out."

He and Garth Bennet shook hands with Matthew and left the bungalow. They walked over the frail little wooden bridge that spanned the Kelli-Oya. Garth's thoughts were full of Mrs. Mansfield. He had hoped to get another glimpse of that lovely perfect face before leaving. It had been a disappointment to him when Matthew had reappeared alone.

The meeting with Viola had marked a significant epoch in his life, and thus it could not fail to impress him. His wife had been dead nearly two years, and this was the first time he had felt even vaguely interested in another woman. He was still jealous for that past grief, had believed that he must prove the exception to the general rule, and that for him Time would carry no alms for oblivion. He was almost angry to find now, that he had a real and intense desire to see Viola again. To see her alone, to talk to her in friendly intimacy, to hear something of her story. Matthew Hudson was a great clumsy brute whom surely it would be easy to circumvent.

"I don't care much for that chap Hudson," he said.

"Oh, he's not really a bad sort. A roughish diamond."

"Does he pay Brett?"

"No, Brett pays him. Stiffish premium, you know. Hudson's very close-fisted."

"Is the boy well off?"

"No, but he's got prospects out here if he gets on well. There's an old uncle with an estate Dimbula way—he'll want a manager for it later on. Unfortunately poor Hartley's got this little weakness, and he's been desperately unhappy and lonely out here. I've had him on my mind for some time past, but it's difficult to say anything to Hudson, as you must have noticed."

His eyes wandered toward the group of gray-green keena-trees, whose boughs were brushed against the night-sky.

Garth was silent. For him the little bungalow, set so far from other human dwellings, alone in this vast mountainous region of tea-estates, had suddenly become invested with a warm and rich glow of romance. He thought he should never forget that evening, with the murmur of the Kelli-Oya, splashing over the great gray bowlders with a hiss of silver spray; the whisper of the trees in the jungle as the wind passed lightly over them; the scent of the earth dew-drenched and mingled with the strong perfume of the cinchona; the starry sky; and Viola Mansfield's soft presence, mysterious, beautiful. Her voice, that he had heard but once, before she vanished into the shadows of the sick-room.

He couldn't even feel very sorry for poor young Hartley Brett. To be tended in this wilderness by such a woman as that. . . . He must see her again—he must discover if there was really no way out for a girl of twenty who had been caught in a most cruel trap.

When the two men had gone, Matthew went

back to the sick-room. He hadn't cared much for Garth Bennet. Too much swagger and self-importance, and the easy assurance of his manner had annoyed Hudson. He was very sorry too that he had seen Viola. Matthew was obsessed now with the idea that Viola was a flirt, that she made every man who saw her, fall a little in love with her. She was just the woman, he felt, to be duped and led into paths of folly. But he meant her to remain at Kellioya. She would have to obey him, and he intended to keep a strict watch over her. If she had been a little younger, a little less independent, he would have set about breaking her spirit. But there was something in Viola which he had not yet been able to measure, a subtle strength that had made her triumph so wonderfully over her past mistakes and sins and failures.

"You shall do the easiest bit," he told her. "You shall keep watch till two o'clock. After that, I'll come and relieve you, and I'll wake you when I go to muster."

"Oh, Matthew, do let me do it all. You'll be tired, and you've got your work."

Matthew's bushy shaggy brows met across his face. Beneath them the red-brown eyes looked suddenly ferocious.

"You'll do just as you're told, if you please," he said, in his harsh dictatorial tone.

Viola submitted. After all, it was never worth while arguing with Matthew, he generally ended by losing his temper and saying all kinds of wounding bruising things. After nearly ten months at Kellioya, Viola had learnt to give in quickly and gracefully. She accepted the hard part of her lot for Hilary's sake.

After a light meal prepared by Hartley's kitchen coolie, Matthew went to bed, and Viola took up her post in Brett's room. The night was very sultry,

and scarcely a breath of air crept through the wooden shutters. There was no punkah, for up-country such things are seldom necessary, the nights being often very chilly. All through those hours of watching, the mosquitoes hummed and buzzed—it was strange that such filmily-fashioned creatures should be capable of emitting such appreciable and sustained sounds. Viola had put back the curtains a little and was fanning Brett, this not only helped to keep his head cool but prevented the pests from stinging his face.

He tossed restlessly from side to side, muttering.

Hudson . . . she caught the name, and leaned forward a little, curious to hear what he would say of Matthew. Hudson . . . he hated him . . . an old skin-flint, exacting his pound of flesh. Not a creeper in Ceylon worked as he did, week in, week out, never a holiday. Never any fun. . . . The Kelli-Oya—curse it!—he was sick of its sound. . . . Roaring just outside the window . . . But that sister of Hudson's! Why didn't she come? Hudson had promised that she should. But of course he would not let her. She was in prison too. No one was ever allowed to see her. Hudson didn't know that he'd run out to speak to her sometimes when he'd seen her go past the factory. He would be angry if he knew. He kept her under lock and key—everyone said so. He wouldn't let people see her if he could help it. No one in the district, not even old Keane, had ever talked to her alone.

Viola listened, and as she listened a kind of dull despair invaded her heart. She seemed to be looking at Matthew and envisaging him through this boy's sick delirious eyes. But it was quite true. She was a prisoner, kept under lock and key. No one was allowed to speak to her alone. Matthew suspected her, watched her. A recluse himself, he insisted that she should also be one. Of course she

could go away, she was in a sense free. But whither could she go? She used to look at the map sometimes and wonder which of all the places marked upon it would be most friendly and least hostile to a woman left alone with an illegitimate child. . . .

If they knew the truth about Hilary, perhaps they wouldn't blame Matthew so bitterly for keeping her "under lock and key." After all, he had given her a home, grudgingly of course, but still it was an efficient shelter, and she liked, in her happy moods, the generous sunshine, the prodigal blossoming, the fragrance and the loveliness that so surrounded her. You couldn't be so very unhappy when the sun shone all day long, almost all the year round, from skies so brilliantly blue; and there was that wonderful vision of mountain tops and seas of blue mist, of gray-green jungle garmenting the hills, and the rolling downs burnt brown by the sun, always visible if one took the trouble to walk across the lawn and through the grove of eucalyptus trees. But in return for that grudgingly given hospitality Matthew exacted the greater part of her income. She found she couldn't even count on that hundred a year. Rebecca or Hilary had broken or spoilt something, and it must be replaced. He couldn't have Rebecca ruining the house with her careless improvident ways. She must pay—it would give her a lesson—idle good-for-nothing woman, eating her head off. And of course in the end the money came out of Viola's own pocket. She knew by this time her brother's ruling passion. "An old skin-flint—exacting his pound of flesh." Did Brett—did Mr. Keane—did all the world know of it, too?

She looked at Brett, at the white face, the weak soft girlish mouth, the receding chin, the wisps of lank fair hair. He oughtn't to be here alone, neglected, forlorn. Something that was very maternal

characterized her feeling for him at that moment. She had wanted often to show him a little quite ordinary kindness, such as inviting him to tea or dinner with them at Kellioya. But she knew such a suggestion would only have provoked a rude sneering refusal from Matthew.

From time to time she gave Brett something cool to drink. She raised the boy's head when it fell over sideways, and arranged the pillows with skilful hands. He was quiet now and seemed to slumber. The air was sensibly fresher. She stopped fanning him and pulled down the mosquito curtains so as to protect him. At last from sheer weariness she closed her eyes.

She awoke with a start. Matthew was standing near her, a huge, motionless figure.

"Go and lie down now," he whispered.

"Oh, Matthew—it's too soon. Do let me watch a little longer. I'm not tired."

Matthew waved his hand toward the door with an authoritative gesture. Viola rose, feeling a little dizzy from her long watching, the absence of proper sleep. "Call me when you have to go to muster, Matthew," she said, with a faint smile.

His eyes watched her as she went out of the room.

It was scarcely dawn when Matthew knocked at the door of the bedroom. Viola rose and opened it. She had put on a loose white wrapper, and her long hair was falling like a dense dark cloud about her shoulders.

"She looks about fifteen," thought Matthew.

He was fully dressed in his ill-made veranda-built cotton suit, and with his broad pith helmet on his head.

"You'll find tea in the veranda," he told her. "I must be off now. But I'll send someone over to set you free as soon as I can. He's on the mend

I should say by the look of him. He's had a quiet night."

"I shall be ready in a few minutes, Matthew, and then I'll go to him," she said.

"You might give him a cup of tea. He'll want something. And if Keane comes over, you can leave at once. It's no good having too many people hanging about."

"Very well, Matthew," she said.

She shut the door and began to make a hasty toilette. Outside, the birds were chirping in the grove of keena-trees. The river had subsided, and its restrained murmur held a cool pleasant sound. There was a delicious and invigorating quality in the early morning air, such as is perhaps only felt in mountain regions. It seemed to bring new life to the new day that was so soon to be filled with hours and hours of fierce sunshine.

CHAPTER VI

WHEN Viola was dressed, she went into the veranda, and found tea awaiting her—that little meal with which every European inhabitant of Ceylon begins the day. There was a loaf of bread and a tin of English-made raspberry jam. Viola ate very little, she was not hungry and the loaf was hard and stale. She drank two cups of tea and then carried some to Mr. Brett. He was awake, and she supported him with one arm while she held the cup to his lips with her other hand. Brett drank thirstily.

"Thanks very much," he muttered. He turned over on his side and seemed to sleep again.

Viola went back to the veranda. To her astonishment she saw a man sitting there, and at first she

thought that Matthew must have returned. But when he turned his head she saw it was not Matthew. It was the young man who had been there with Mr. Keane last night—Sir Garth Bennet.

It was scarcely six o'clock and she was surprised to see him at such an early hour.

He rose and came toward her. "Good-morning, Mrs. Mansfield. How is Brett this morning?"

"Matthew thinks he's on the mend," she answered; "I've just given him a cup of tea."

"You must be tired," said Garth, in a voice of winning sweetness.

"Oh, no, I only sat up till a little after one. Then my brother relieved me."

Still, she was very pale and looked as if she had not slept at all. Round her eyes, faintly hollowed, there were little purple stains. By morning light, he decided, she looked her twenty years. Girlish in aspect, her expression was mature. Yet her face was quite without bitterness or disillusionment. It was calm and serene, even happy. So she had learned to accept the grim past whatever it had been, too thankful perhaps that it *was* past, to trouble her head greatly about it.

"I will go and get you a cup. I expect you'd like some tea."

She vanished through a doorway. Presently she returned with cup, saucer, and plate, all in a slightly damaged condition."

"Poor boy, his place is not what you'd call well found," she said, pouring out a cup of the strong new tea that has a peculiar aroma and richness of flavor which never fully survive packing and transportation.

Bennet drank the tea with evident relish. What charming hands she had, he thought, neither too large nor too small. Such white capable cared-for hands. The slender steady fingers . . . on one of

them she wore a wedding ring. He could not help wondering what manner of man had placed it there—some fool or knave who did not know how to keep the treasure he had won. . . .

He had risen early and come across a mile of dew-drenched tea bushes to secure this interview with her. He had heard Matthew say last night at what hour he must leave to go to muster. And he had crept out almost before it was light, afraid that Keane would hear him, for he was still staying with him until Madura was ready.

Bennet had been secretly astonished at his own zest for the adventure. He would have felt as disappointed as a schoolboy if anything had intervened to prevent him from coming. He desperately wanted to see Mrs. Mansfield alone, to talk to her, to make friends. For of course they must become friends—two young people, alone and sad, in this solitude. Both having lost something that once had been dear. All very well for elderly men like Hudson and Keane to live without society and amusement and recreation, but he couldn't stand that sort of thing himself.

"We must be friends," he thought. Keane had warned him that Hudson wouldn't let anyone even see his sister if he could help it, but he meant to circumvent him.

He drank his tea in silence. When he had finished he offered her a cigarette. Viola shook her head and laughed.

"No, thanks—I used to smoke when I was in Italy. Everyone does, you know. But if I were to do it here, Matthew would have a fit."

"Do you always do as he wishes?" asked Garth, boldly.

"Almost always."

"You must find it very lonely at Kellioya?"

"I don't mind. You see, I've got my baby."

"My son is six years old," said Garth. He added pensively: "He has no mother—my wife died nearly two years ago."

"Oh, I'm so sorry for you," said Viola, with sudden sympathy.

"It was pretty awful," he said. "And one hates to feel that a grief like that—a grief that simply cuts your life in two—can ever grow less."

"But it does grow less," she said, softly. "Even wounds that are worse to bear than great sorrows seem to get better in time." Her face wore a melancholy, brooding look.

She rose abruptly then and went back to Brett's room, as if she had heard some sound emanating therefrom. Garth, who had heard nothing, felt annoyed at her departure. He had a great longing to tell her about his wife, of whom he seldom spoke even to his relations and intimate friends.

From Brett's room he could hear the low murmur of voices. So the boy was awake.

Garth did not stir. It was delicious here with the fresh scents and dewy fragrance of the morning filling that divinely pure air. The sound of the Kelli-Oya was like a soft, sustained, musical accompaniment. Above the strip of jungle a great hawk was poised against the blue.

Of course it was a pity, he reflected, to ruin such scenery as this with these ugly symmetrical rows of tea, the neat little bushes with their glossy polished leaves and their white innocent flowers that somehow reminded him of very pale wild roses. Coffee was a much prettier shrub, and cacao the prettiest of all.

A number of coolies, men, women and children, had begun to work on the opposite hill. They were under the leadership of a colored foreman, an Eurasian, who wore a cotton suit and a pith helmet and shouted instructions to them. Soon they were dis-

persed over the hillside, plucking the young tender shoots and dropping them into their round deep baskets. As they worked they chattered, and sometimes they sang the melancholy crooning coolie-songs of the east, that were like some wild primeval music, with a regular, rhythmic, monotonous beat. He could see the turbaned heads of the men, the glossy dark hair of the women, a flash of scarlet or yellow loosely draping a lithe brown body.

Garth appreciated the little scene. A pleasant way this of working, of earning the few cents that were sufficient for the daily measure of rice. These people were very simple and hardy; they had reduced the necessities of life to a minimum. Rough dwellings with mud floor and thatched roof sufficed them for shelter, a handful of rice eaten once or at most twice daily with perhaps a banana or two for food, while their scanty apparel did not cover much less clothe their slim active brown bodies. But they were for the most part happy and contented, were well looked after in sickness by their European employers, and enjoyed a healthy open air life in a beautiful climate.

Garth began to think of his newly-acquired estate of Madura. It was situated in one of the most fertile spots in Ceylon, and though the land had suffered from the neglect and poverty of its late owner, Deepham, Garth possessed the necessary capital with which to develop it and sufficient command of his time to spend at least half the year there superintending the work. He couldn't make his home altogether in the island because of his boy Kenneth, whom he particularly wished to educate entirely in England. When he was grown up he could come out on a visit, but for many years to come he would be in the throes of a course of education that must necessarily fill his life to the brim. Garth was proud of his son, of his good looks, his clever intelligent

ways, even of his affection for himself, which was already of a peculiarly clinging quality, as if he almost understood that he was all in all to his remaining parent. Kenneth was probably asking his grandmother and aunts every day when "Daddy" was going to return.

Garth had decided to plant a certain amount of his land with rubber. Even in the early 'nineties far-seeing men were beginning to realize that there was a future for this resilient commodity. Coffee had failed many years ago; the tea that had taken its place had been over-produced and was fetching low prices in the great markets of the world; but rubber promised an abundant harvest. The island was very rich, very fertile, very fruitful; hadn't the Portuguese said in the old days that it would be better for them to lose all their colonial possessions than the little island of Lanka, that 'Eden of the Eastern Wave' with its jewels, its cinnamon, and ivory, its cardamoms, camphor and cocoanuts?

Garth liked Ceylon; he enjoyed the brilliant sunshine, the cool crisp early morning air in these mountain fastnesses, the wonderful starry nights. That delicious rarefied air on the heights gave one a pleasant bracing sense of renewal each day. Yes, he meant to get things going soon, to work, to succeed, to forget. . . . Somehow he had never felt so hopeful, so sure of success, as he did this morning.

He was so deep in these dreams that he did not even hear Viola as she came toward him. She looked frightened.

"It's odd. He seemed better at first. Now he doesn't know me. . . . Will you come?"

Garth followed her into the little bare gloomy room with its dilapidated teak furniture, its worn strips of cocoanut matting.

Young Brett was lying on the bed, very still and

pale. There was a curious waxen look on his face and the lips were slightly blue.

"I don't like the look of him, do you?" she whispered. "And I can hardly feel his pulse. Oh, do you think we could send for someone—Matthew or Mr. Keane?"

"We might send one of the servants. I couldn't leave you alone here," said Garth. He too felt alarmed; something of her anxiety had communicated itself to him. He laid his finger on young Brett's wrist; the pulse was scarcely discernible.

Viola bent over him.

"Mr. Brett—Hartley!" she said.

Her clear ringing voice seemed to penetrate across the boy's dazed senses. He opened his eyes.

"Mrs. Mansfield . . . how kind of you to come. . . ."

"I want you to say a little prayer after me," she said.

"A prayer?"

"Yes, an act of contrition—of sorrow for all the things you've ever done to offend Almighty God."

"Contrition?" He looked at her with sick, haggard gaze. But he was conscious and was perhaps aware that her request was an unusual one.

"I've never been much of a hand at praying," he said, apologetically.

"Well, I want you to pray now. It's quite short. Say the words after me." Her voice held a note of authority.

She knelt down and crossed herself: "O my God . . ."

"O my God," came the weak voice from the bed.

"I am very sorry that I have sinned against Thee because Thou art so good, and by the help of Thy Holy Grace I will never sin again. Amen."

Hartley Brett uttered each phrase after her with a curious mechanical precision. "By the help

of Thy Holy Grace I will never sin again. Amen."

"Now the Act of Faith."

The brief simple acts of faith, hope and charity were each in turn repeated. Hartley's voice was growing strangely weak; it seemed an effort to him to obey. But his glittering eyes were fixed upon Viola's face.

"Now just one little prayer more, dear Hartley. *Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, I trust in Thee.*"

A light film glazed the boy's blue eyes, his lips moved, and he even uttered the words, *Most Sacred Heart of Jesus . . .* then the voice failed. His head fell backward. Viola signed to Garth to draw near.

"He's gone," she whispered. There were tears in her eyes. She knelt down again and prayed, her face hidden in her hands.

When she rose she was pale and composed. "Would you go to our bungalow and tell Matthew, and ask my maid Rebecca to come? I don't like to bother you, but I shall want help."

"Oh, but you simply can't be left," he blurted out, astonished at her calm. The sudden passing of this boy whom he scarcely knew, had shaken even him a little.

"Oh, I'm all right. I must pray for him, you know."

"Pray? Now that he's dead?"

"Yes, more than ever, now he's dead. Oh, please be as quick as you can. . . . I was afraid the heart was failing—I could hardly feel his pulse."

Garth touched her hand almost awkwardly. "I'm sure you were a great comfort to him," he said. "He was quite happy—he didn't seem to want anything—to miss anything. And then praying to the last. . . ."

He hurried out of the room. The words of that last prayer which poor young Brett hadn't been able

to finish rang in his head, full of the strange solemnity of the hour.

"Most Sacred Heart of Jesus I trust in Thee."

He thought they sounded a note of high, secure courage and confidence. He wished he had known of them in the hour of his own supreme desolation. . . .

CHAPTER VII

VIOLA and Rebecca had hardly completed their sad task when Matthew Hudson appeared. He had been working that morning in a distant part of the estate and the news had not reached him at once. He arrived at the little bungalow almost simultaneously with Mr. Keane.

To Matthew the sudden death of his "creeper" had been a severe shock, and he was not free from self-reproach. He had been a hard taskmaster to the dead boy, had crowded work upon him, refusing to give him the holidays and relaxation that were necessary for him if he was to learn to endure his lonely life. Day after day he had risen soon after five to be present at muster, more than a mile away, and he had done this up to the very morning when his illness had taken an acute form. No doubt he must have been ailing for some time past and had not dared to beg for a few days' leave of absence. And in his solitude and misery he had neglected himself, drinking too much at times, and eating insufficient and unnourishing food, consisting, for the most part, of the contents of tins.

Well, he would have to write and tell his mother, Matthew reflected ruefully. He hoped Keane would be prudent and discreet in his letter of condolence. Perhaps he had already written to warn her that her son was not getting on too well in Ceylon, and if so she might blame Matthew for not

having sent him home long ago for a change. Still, he was thankful that he would be able to say in his letter: "We were with him all night. My sister was there when he died." The heart had failed suddenly and unexpectedly—Hartley had never looked as if he possessed the stamina of a rat. The work and the climate, combined with solitude and a too frequent recourse to the whisky-bottle, had proved too much for his naturally frail constitution.

It was Sir Garth Bennet who had brought Matthew the news, arriving breathlessly upon what was known as Combe Down (thus named by a native of Bath who had once owned it) after he had left the message for Rebecca at Kellioya.

Bennet's arrival had been a disagreeable surprise, and had revealed to Matthew that he must have gone over to poor Brett's bungalow at an early hour. Hudson seldom liked his fellow-men, and he had taken an instinctive dislike to the young owner of Madura. Too much swank and swagger—just because he had private means and a title. Supercilious too in his manner. But startled and shocked—one could see that—and eager that Hudson should go at once to Mrs. Mansfield's assistance. She was alone—she had begged him to go for her maid—he had left word at Kellioya—and then had come to find Matthew himself.

All this in a voice that shook a little with emotion; his nerves had suffered somewhat from the shock.

Matthew stood there listening, his great powerful figure outlined against a background of gray-green jungle. There was no sign of emotion on his heavy face. But his little ferocious eyes snapped as they peered at Bennet from beneath the shaggy pent-house of brows.

"Oh, I'll go over at once. Thanks for telling me."

He turned to give some instructions in rapid Tamil to the "kangany" who was in charge of that particular gang of coolies.

Bennet had felt himself dismissed. Hudson hadn't asked a single question, nor had he had the courtesy to invite him to go and rest at Kellioya after his long hurried walk. He went moodily back to Mr. Keane's bungalow, arriving there more than an hour later. By this time the sun was getting very powerful, and Garth was exhausted by his quick walk and the emotions of the morning. But he was satisfied nevertheless that the very circumstances of their mutual association with this death-bed scene—such a poignant little scene—had established a kind of inevitable intimacy between himself and Mrs. Mansfield. They could no longer feel like strangers to each other. And then she had been so wonderful with those simple little Catholic prayers of hers. They had seemed to calm and comfort the dying boy. He found himself repeating the words: *Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, I trust in Thee. . . .* Garth had not prayed since the death of his wife, but now he felt that no day should pass for him without a repetition of that beautiful little ejaculatory prayer. It *did* hold comfort and consolation, and a faith that could calmly envisage all sorrows and griefs. He began to understand why Mrs. Mansfield, who must have suffered so much, had been able to retain that calm serene expression, that limpid outlook.

On his way back he encountered Keane, told him the news, and watched him as he hurried off in the direction of the river, evidently bent on reaching the little bungalow as soon as possible. Garth did not offer to accompany him. He hoped Viola would go home soon and rest; she must be quite worn out after the fatigue and emotion of the last twelve hours. To-morrow he would go over to Kellioya

and call upon her. No matter how rude and disagreeable Hudson might be, he intended to see Mrs. Mansfield again.

Although he was twenty-eight years old he had only once been in love and that was with the woman he had married after a few weeks' acquaintance. Their union had been very happy, and he was still genuinely mourning her death when he came to Madura. During her lifetime they had lived always at Stonewood, his place in Gloucestershire, where, like so many Englishmen, Garth had enjoyed the life of games and sport which his country home had offered. He hunted and shot and fished, played golf and cricket and lawn-tennis; he took an active part in local affairs. Nor was he without intellectual interests, and had made many additions to the already valuable library at Stonewood. He had succeeded his father when only fourteen, and during his long minority sufficient money had been saved to make him a rich man.

Until he had seen Mrs. Mansfield—was it really only yesterday afternoon?—he had never even remotely contemplated marrying again. But now he was beginning consciously to feel a passionate interest in this woman. And she was not free. She could not set herself free. She belonged to a man from whom she was separated. It could be through no fault of her own, since she had the custody of her child. This man must have been faithless to her. If he ever met him! . . .

Garth went into his room and flung himself upon a couch. He closed his eyes, and his imagination reconstructed the scene of the morning. He could see Viola standing there, he watched the movements of her beautiful maternal hands; he listened again to those simple effectual prayers that had fallen so easily from her lips as if from long custom and familiarity. No effort, no cant, but this

wonderful attempt to reconcile the erring creature with an Omnipotent Creator. He could remember saying *Amen*, just as if it had been the most natural thing in the world. He had had a curious inexplicable impulse to associate himself with those prayers of hers. . . .

He was very ignorant about the Catholic religion; he quite saw that a proud independent nation had had to free itself from the "power of the Pope," and he had always believed that the Catholic Faith consisted largely in a blind adherence to medieval superstitions which no sane person could possibly accept. That it could be a living thing, of vital assistance in life and in death, he had never envisaged. He resolved to learn more about it at the first opportunity, approaching it simply as a branch of knowledge of which he was professedly ignorant, and to which the personality of Viola Mansfield had attracted him.

"You'd better send your sister home at once, Hudson," said Keane, as Matthew approached the little bungalow. "She's simply worn out, and I can't get her to stir."

"Oh, I'll soon see to that," said Hudson.

He went, treading very softly, into Brett's darkened room. He saw the stark form lying beneath the sheet upon the bed, and near it Viola was kneeling apparently absorbed in prayer. She glanced up as Matthew came in, and rose to her feet. He could see that her face though very pale was quite calm.

"It's no use your staying here now," he whispered, "go home at once. Tell them I shall be late this morning."

"I'd rather stay here, please, Matthew."

"Nonsense! You can't do anything. Besides,

you're in the way. Go home at once." His voice was rough and dictatorial.

Viola went out of the room. She dreaded the long walk back to Kellioya in the hot sun. She had sent Rebecca home as soon as possible so as not to leave Hilary alone with the native servants any longer. And she wished to remain and watch by the dead boy until they came to take him away. But if she had told Matthew she wanted to stay and pray for the repose of the soul of poor young Hartley Brett, he would certainly not have understood her, and perhaps he would have said something scornful and contemptuous.

She went back to Kellioya, plodding slowly up the hill in the broiling sun. When she reached the bungalow she told the servants that her brother would be late and breakfast must be put off for an hour beyond its usual time. Having done this she went to her room and throwing herself upon the bed fell into a deep slumber. She was awakened by Rebecca, who came to tell her that breakfast was ready.

"Oh, Rebecca, say I can't come—I'm too tired and I don't want anything to eat."

Matthew was annoyed at his sister's non-appearance, but he made no comment, and after swallowing a hasty breakfast he began to make the necessary arrangements for the funeral, which would take place at Nuwara Eliya on the following day. The body would be transported as far as the road at an early hour, and thence driven to Nuwara Eliya, accompanied by Mr. Keane. In the East only a few hours ordinarily elapse between death and burial.

He would have to go to Nuwara Eliya himself this afternoon and arrange everything for the funeral on the morrow. It was a bore—he hadn't wished to leave Kellioya just now. Viola would be

alone with only Rebecca and the native servants. Perhaps he had better tell the Eurasian conductor to sleep in the house. He didn't like to leave them quite unprotected.

Keane was coming over this afternoon to see him before he started, and to consult him about the details. He wasn't sure he wouldn't give him a hint that he really couldn't have young Bennet hanging about his sister. He had ascertained that Bennet had paid an unnecessarily early visit to poor Brett's bungalow that morning. Anxiety for the sick boy—who could only have been the merest acquaintance—might possibly have actuated him, but he had scarcely taken his eyes from Viola's face last night, and it was much more probable that, hearing she was to be alone, he had gone thither to secure this unusual opportunity of an interview with her. Matthew sincerely wished that Bennet hadn't bought Madura. There was a point by the river where the three estates touched, his own, Keane's and Bennet's.

"He'll just have to learn that I don't keep open house," said Matthew.

He went down to the carpenter's shop, which was not far from the factory. A sound of hammering came from within, and he looked in to satisfy himself that the rough coffin was being fashioned. Then he passed on to the factory, inhaling the aroma from the old-fashioned chula-house, where the tea-leaves were being roasted upon great trays moved swiftly backward and forward over glowing fires by scantily clad coolies. The warm fragrance of those freshly roasted leaves was delicious to Matthew; he could tell the quality of the tea from the odor, and he knew that this batch was of the first order. It signified more rupees to add to his hoard. Why, he hardly spent any of his own money

on food now! Viola's contribution paid for nearly all.

He had been told that Bennet was going to set up a lot of new-fangled machinery, with a special contrivance for roasting the leaves which would save time and labor. He didn't believe there was any use in that. Bennet must have yielded to the specious pretenses of some of those great engineering firms in Colombo. The tea had always been roasted by hand at Kellioya, and where could you get better tea or any that had a higher reputation in the English market? Bennet would probably ruin his coolies with too much indulgent attention . . . he would spoil the labor market . . . he was a young rich fool without knowledge or experience, and was bound to squander his substance. The worst of it was that in setting a higher standard of comfort for his men, an example which others were bound to follow, he would also injure his fellow-planters.

Matthew strolled back to the house. He was uneasy and restless, for although he had concealed the fact, the death of young Brett had made a very deep and unpleasant impression upon him. He had kept the boy in Ceylon against his conscience for the sake of the really handsome premium his mother was paying. People knew about that premium, for Brett hadn't attempted to keep silence about it, and Matthew was aware he had been criticized adversely for accepting such a big one. Keane had known only too well that the boy had been getting into bad ways, and had spoken very seriously to Hudson on the subject some months ago. Matthew disliked to think he would be criticized and even blamed for the affair, and perhaps even held responsible by some for the boy's death. He liked to stand well with his fellow-planters; he didn't mind being called a rough diamond or a skin-flint, or a

surly inhospitable man, but he did object to having his honor even indirectly impugned. People were bound to talk—that was the worst of an island with a small European community where everyone was known at least by name to everyone else. It was a hot-bed of gossip, and he would have to run the gauntlet of endless questioning from every single soul he was destined to meet in Nuwara Eliya on the morrow.

Keane arrived at the bungalow almost directly after Matthew had ensconced himself on a long chair in the veranda, his feet stretched out upon the two arms that protruded beyond the chair itself. Viola had not re-appeared since the morning, but no doubt she was wise to take a rest.

“I’m starting at half past four,” said Matthew.

“Yes?” said Keane. “I shall get off at dawn tomorrow myself, and we ought to be at the road by nine if you could get the carriages there by then.”

“Oh, I’ll see to that.”

The two men discussed the necessary details, and then Keane said:

“I hope it’s not awfully inconvenient for you to go to Nuwara Eliya? But one of us must be here to see to everything this end.”

“Oh, no—I should have had to go soon in any case on business. It’s months since I was there. Having my sister with me makes it difficult for me to get away.”

“How is Mrs. Mansfield? None the worse, I hope?”

“Thanks—she’s all right. A little tired—she’s lying down.”

Keane paused a moment and then he said:

“Bennet tells me she was simply wonderful . . . she made that poor boy pray before he died.”

Matthew was silent. A little inward scorching anger took possession of him.

"It seemed to comfort him wonderfully, Garth said," added Keane.

"You must give Bennet a hint that I don't care to have visitors here at Kellioya," said Matthew. "My sister and I like to lead a very quiet life. She has her child and I've got my work. We don't want interruptions from outside."

"My dear Hudson, that's nothing new. But I don't think it's necessary for me to say anything. If he's heard anything of you he must have heard that." Keane's voice was quite kind, but Matthew felt the veiled reproof.

"Is Bennet coming with you to-morrow?" he inquired.

"Oh, no. You see, he hardly knew Brett, and he's busy getting things straight at Madura."

"I hope to goodness he won't come hanging round here while I'm away," said Matthew.

"I don't think there's any fear of that," said Keane, coolly. "And if he did there'd be no harm. He's a very nice young chap, and if he likes to talk to your sister, who can blame him?"

"I don't choose to have him," said Matthew, "and I'm master here." His face was as hard as a stone statue, and had the same rough-hewn look. Keane saw that it was useless to argue with him. He would give Bennet the required hint, but Bennet too was obstinate, and it would take more than a hint to stop him from seeing Mrs. Mansfield should he feel an inclination to do so.

He and Matthew must fight it out between them.

He rose to go, and Matthew accompanied him across the lawn. On their way they met Rebecca leading little Hilary by the hand. The child could toddle. In her white frock and with her sunny curls and smiling rosy baby face she looked what the nurses call a "little picture." Keane stopped to kiss her; he was fond of children.

"Pretty little girl—that niece of yours," he said, as they walked on.

"Oh, she'd be decent enough if her mother didn't spoil her," said Hudson, morosely.

"Oh, well, a baby of that age," said Keane.

They parted at the top of the hill, Matthew returning moodily to the bungalow.

CHAPTER VIII

VIOLA rose after Matthew had started on his ride through the jungle. Rebecca carried a long chair for her into the shade of the eucalyptus trees, and she lay there, playing languidly with Hilary. She did not quite know why, but something made her recall that foggy day in London when she had lain and looked at her cloudy image in the blackened window-pane and said: "If I ever have a daughter . . ." But perhaps it was this capriciously evoked memory that made her clasp the child very close to her and put her cheek against the soft plump baby one. Hilary gave little strangled gurgles of joy and contentment, and it was thus that Garth Bennet, coming suddenly through a gap in the trees, discovered them. He stopped for an appreciable moment, watching them. They made a charming picture—the white-clad mother and child. Viola looked such a very young mother. Her dark head was pressed against Hilary's tumbled golden curls.

"My precious, precious darling!" He heard her utter those words, enraptured. Then kisses—kisses and low laughter. He felt an odd sensation, as if something were clawing at his heart. Perhaps he was thinking of a somewhat similar scene at Stonewood only a few summers ago . . . Memory smites blindly, careless of the wounds she inflicts.

He knew then that he could have loved this woman, playing with her baby in this beautiful island fastness. She could have healed his wounds and perhaps slain the memories that were too poignant to be borne. But she was a Catholic. She could not divorce her husband and marry again. Even if she obtained a civil divorce it did not release her from her marriage vow or permit her to marry again during his lifetime. She was a good Catholic, too. He had felt certain of that when he stood and listened to her as she prayed beside the dying boy. No prayers had ever affected him like that before. All day those words had rung in his head: *Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, I trust in Thee.*

He could hear poor Hartley Brett's voice stumbling into silence over those words. . . .

He came across the lawn and approached Viola.

"May I come, Mrs. Mansfield, or shall you think me a fearful bore? But I knew I should find you alone."

The hint had been faithfully given by Keane, but, as he had foreseen, it had not been taken. Bennet was determined to pursue his acquaintance with the beautiful Mrs. Mansfield.

"Oh, do come," said Viola, rising.

He sat down on a chair near her. "What a darling baby!"

"Yes, isn't she?"

"I never saw such green eyes," he said, tilting up the little flower face with his hand. The child looked at him with steady scrutiny as if summing him up. The result was evidently satisfactory for she put a chubby grubby hand into his and said:

"Like 'oo."

And Garth Bennet colored like a boy. "Thank you," he said, laughing. The child's favor seemed to him a good omen.

"I wish they were blue," said Viola, "she ought

to have blue eyes with that flaxen hair. I like blue eyes best. But we can't change them, can we, darling?"

Hilary repeated parrot-like: "Can't change them."

"Oh, well, they're very individual," said Garth, pleasantly. "And with those black lashes—the only dark thing about her—they're very effective too. I was only wondering where I'd seen eyes like that before."

Viola gave a quick little shudder which was fortunately unperceived by Garth. The eyes were, alas, so readily recognizable by anyone who knew Lady Bethnell and Esmé. But surely those ghosts could not arise to disturb her now? She was so safe from discovery here.

Bennet's eyes traveled from the child's face to the mother's.

"When is Mr. Hudson coming back?" he asked, leaning back in his chair and lighting a cigarette.

"To-morrow night. He's got business in Nuwara Eliya after the funeral."

"I'm told he doesn't care for visitors," he remarked.

"That's quite true."

"It was one of the reasons why I came to-day. I knew he wouldn't be here. And I wanted to know how you were, after the tragic scene this morning."

"It made me very sad because of Hartley's mother," said Viola. "And, then, I had only once seen death before. That was when I was a little girl and my aunt died. But she was old, and it didn't seem so sad as to see a very young man like poor Hartley Brett dying too so far from his mother."

"Didn't you care about your aunt?"

"Not—not very much," she admitted, reluctantly,

wondering why it seemed almost natural to speak of these things to a young man whom she had seen only twice before. "But she was good to me in her way. She adopted me when my mother died. And it was she who made me a Catholic. I'm very grateful to her for that. It's always helped me to forgive her!"

"To forgive her!" echoed Bennet. "Why, wasn't she kind?"

Viola made an enchanting little grimace. "She did her duty by me."

But he noticed that she cuddled Hilary more closely to her.

"I wonder you liked being made a Catholic," he said, after a moment's pause, "I wonder you're grateful to her for that. It seems to me such a hampering thing." It was a bold little speech, and it astonished Viola, although she had no idea of what was really passing in his mind.

"I am glad and grateful, all the same," she said, simply; "and though it may be hampering in one sense, it gives—oh, so much more than it takes." Her eyes shone a little. So it was no use following up that track. She rejoiced in her fetters. . . .

The sun was slanting in golden rays on the grove of eucalyptus trees. Their lower leaves were almost blue against the pale mottled bark, but the slender pointed foliage on the higher branches was lustrously green, lifted against a sky of warm sapphire. It was a perfect evening, very still and peaceful.

"Don't you find it dull here, Mrs. Mansfield?"

"Not exactly. You see, I've got Hilary. But it isn't exciting."

"Have you been here long?"

"Rather more than a year."

"A year!" he repeated. "But you go away sometimes, I suppose? To Kandy—to Colombo?"

"I've never been away since I came," she answered, tranquilly.

"Why, I've only been here a few weeks, and I've felt dull and homesick sometimes," Garth admitted.

"But you needn't stay—you're free," she said, softly.

"But I don't want in the least to throw up Madura. Now I've bought it I want to make a big success of it. I've the very newest things in machinery coming out from England with a special man to put them up. I shall have an electric plant with all that water so handy, and there'll be electric light in the bungalow and cooking things too. I shall use the Kelli-Oya as she's never been used before." His brown eyes danced.

Yes, he was young, keen, ambitious. When Viola contrasted him with Matthew, she sighed. Matthew was so satisfied with the old ways, that he regarded any innovations as mere waste of money.

"I daresay an old hand like your brother would think I'm just flinging money about," he said.

She was silent. She was scrupulously loyal to Matthew.

"Anyhow, Keane gives me lots of encouragement. He says he shall follow suit if my things turn out a success. But, then, he's got to think of those two boys of his—"

"Oh, if they're a success everyone will want to copy you," she said, brightly.

"Your brother must be feeling awfully cut up about poor young Brett. His own creeper too. Of course it was nobody's fault, but I think one would feel responsible."

"I'm sure Matthew doesn't feel responsible. Poor Mr. Brett got drenched, he must have gone about with pneumonia on him for several days—the heart failed." Her voice trembled a little. She felt that the boy had had but a weak hold on life. Still,

something might have been done for him if it had only been taken in time. "Now he's dead I wish I could have done more for him. But it was difficult for me, as Matthew doesn't like me to ask people here."

It was an opportunity and Garth Bennet made use of it.

"Does that mean that I'm never to see you either?" he asked.

His words astonished her, although she had not been unconscious of the homage in his eyes. They had met for the first time yesterday, they could hardly be said to know each other at all. But events had forced them into a premature intimacy. They had watched together beside a death-bed. She could not regard him with indifference, nor yet quite as a stranger. What did he know of her story? Probably Mr. Keane had told him that she was separated from her husband. Matthew insisted upon that explanation and it certainly led to less questioning. People hesitated before asking for further details.

"It means . . . that we shan't often meet," she said.

"But I shall want to see you very often," said Garth, boldly.

Viola colored faintly. "I'm afraid it's no use your thinking of it."

"Hudson simply can't keep you shut up like a prisoner! Why, you are a mere girl—you can't possibly be satisfied with Kellioya!"

There was indignation in his tone.

"I'm twenty, and I feel very old."

"Don't listen to him! Lead your own life!"

She smiled. "It's easy for a man to talk like that. But as long as I live with Matthew, I must do as he wishes. And you mustn't think I find it so

very hard. I've always—all my life—had to do what someone else wanted. There was my aunt first. If I didn't obey her, I was punished . . . And then there was my brother George, with his wife. Then another brother Percival and his wife—I had to teach their children."

"And then?" he said, interested at the simple recital.

"Then for a little while I pleased myself—and I suffered for it."

He knew she must be speaking of her marriage. Something like a pang of pain passed through him. She was fettered on all sides. . . .

"Really suffered, I mean," she went on, in a cool level emotionless voice. "I know what it's like. So I should be a fool to complain of Matthew's pin-pricks."

"But don't you ever walk out alone?" He felt a desperate desire to arrange perhaps some place of meeting. He couldn't go away, utterly uncertain as to when he should see her again. "We might meet sometimes down by the river. That turn just beyond poor Brett's bungalow. It is on Madura—Hudson couldn't warn me off if he wanted to."

"But he might warn me off," she said, quietly.

"Oh, do let's arrange it now," he pleaded.

"No," said Viola.

"You'd think it wrong to do what he disapproved?"

"No—it isn't that."

"I'd like to be friends, Mrs. Mansfield," he said, suddenly, with an almost boyish simplicity. "We're both lonely here, and we *could* be friends."

Yes, that at least was true. But she only said: "Oh, you'll soon have lots of friends. And when you are bored you can go to Nuwara Eliya."

Her cool voice snubbed him into silence. He was

making no progress. And he had so hoped to be able to ensure future meetings.

She was so beautiful. . . . The thought struck him that if she hadn't been married he would have asked her there and then to marry him as soon as possible. Of course it would be a mad bold thing to do, but sometimes the most cautious of men had done mad bold things and had never regretted them.

She rose and put Hilary on the ground. "It's Hilary's bed-time," she said.

Garth sprang to his feet. There was no doubt he was dismissed.

"Oh, have I offended you, Mrs. Mansfield?"

"Not in the least!" Her smile was kind, even friendly; it reassured him.

"Then may I come and see you in the morning?" he asked.

"I am always in the house or garden."

"Keane will be away all day. It'll keep me from thinking of poor young Brett."

She moved toward the house. He watched her as she went, her white dress trailing over the grass. Hilary, plump and still unsteady, waddled beside her. But there was to-morrow. That at least was a temporary reprieve from his sentence of banishment. She hadn't said that he might not come. There was comfort in the thought. He watched her as she disappeared into the house.

The night was clear and starry, with wonderful moonlight. The Milky Way looked indeed like the River of Heaven, as the Japanese poetically call it. A broad pale river flowing across the sky, with stars shining upon both its banks. It divided the dark velvet blue of the night firmament. Low in the south the Southern Cross flamed like a gigantic luminous jewel.

Viola had been in bed for some little time when she was aware of stealthy footsteps treading the little path that ran not far from that side of the bungalow. It was a path that went behind the grove of eucalyptus trees after leaving the bungalow at right angles. And it went down the hill westward to where a bridge spanned the Kelli-Oya, and you found yourself in Madura.

Viola went to the window very softly for fear of waking Hilary, and unfastening the wooden shutters she looked out. A man was walking on the path, that shone in the moonlight as if it had been strewn with crystals and silver. He paced to and fro with measured steps. It was past midnight, and her heart beat with a little fear. That was the worst of being a mother—one was so often a little afraid. She was never afraid for herself. But Hilary . . . She whispered a brief prayer.

Now he had turned and in the moonlight she recognized him by reason of his unusual height, and a certain graceful way he had of walking. It was Garth Bennet. He was marching up and down like a sentinel, just as if this had been a royal palace that must not be left unguarded day or night. Perhaps some such thought as this had prompted him to come and guard this remote bungalow in the Ceylon hills. He hadn't liked her to be there alone, unprotected, with Matthew away.

She closed the shutters softly and went back to bed. She fell asleep at last to the measured ceaseless rhythm of those footsteps falling crisply on the path.

She knew then that he loved her. This evening he had tried to tell her so, and she had checked him.

But he must not love her. Love was over for her. There remained, yes, thank God, there remained Hilary. . . .

CHAPTER IX

IT WAS nearly eleven o'clock on the following morning when Garth Bennet appeared. He had risen early and had accompanied Mr. Keane for a couple of miles or so through the jungle, while a little ahead of them the coolies proceeded, carrying their tragic burden.

He had been sobered by that walk. It had been wonderful too, in that crystal-clear air of dawn, going along the narrow path, following Keane, who was mounted on his steady gray cob. The silent dense jungle lay all around them, with its thick clinging undergrowth, so often armed with thorns that were like miniature spears and could inflict almost as deep a wound. From the trees blossoming orchids looked down upon them with half human faces. The tree ferns growing to an immense height made patches of delicate feathery emerald verdure. Jungle fowls flew past with flaming plumage and hoarse cry of fear. The narrow path was cut on the side of a hill with overhanging rocks on one side and a sheer precipice descending for hundreds of feet on the other, all densely overgrown with jungle.

At a certain point Garth had left Keane to continue his journey alone. He returned to Madura and later went to see Viola.

He wondered if she would receive him. Perhaps she would send the servant back with some excuse. He must have shown her last evening during their conversation on the lawn, that he had begun to take an especial interest in her. But fortified by her brother's intense dislike to visitors she could very easily refuse to see him.

As he approached the bungalow, he saw her sitting in the veranda quite alone. Not even Hilary was there to distract her attention. The thought

pleased him. For once they could have a long private talk and perhaps he would learn something more of her, and even discover if the obstacles that prevented her from marrying again were as insuperable as Keane believed them to be.

Viola rose and stood on the steps of the bungalow to greet him. She looked both rested and refreshed.

"May I come in, Mrs. Mansfield?"

He knew that he must be many years older than Viola, yet she could make him feel like an awkward, embarrassed school-boy.

"Of course you may!"

He took her hand in greeting. "How are you? Rested, I hope?"

"Yes, thank you."

She sat down on a wicker chair piled with cushions. Garth sat opposite to her.

"Do smoke," she said.

He lit a cigarette.

"I hope you'll stay and have breakfast with me. You know, we never call it tiffin up-country."

"Yes, I've wondered why. But whether it's breakfast or tiffin I shall love to stay."

Unlike Matthew, Viola was naturally hospitable. She would have been delighted to see their neighbors dropping in as a matter of course to meals, just as they did in other districts. Once she had said something of the kind to her brother, but he had only replied grimly: "You'd have a nice beef-book if you went in for that kind of promiscuous hospitality."

Viola, however, was never permitted to see the "beef-book." Matthew preferred to deal with it himself, and loud and violent were the recriminations if the unfortunate cook dared to overpass a certain fixed limit based upon the maximum of economy. The said book was the one in which the cook's accounts and expenditure were all entered.

In a land where there is little mutton—and that generally goat—beef forms the staple item of meat. There were two “beef-days,” as they were called, in the week, when the butcher offered his wares for sale. Chickens were cheap and plentiful, if the supply of meat was insufficient to last until the following “beef-day,” and there were always vegetables and fruit in abundance. Matthew kept an eye on current prices and left little margin for the most wily and accomplished cook to provide himself with any commission.

Viola had hoped that Bennet would come; she was feeling lonely, and the prospect of his company was an agreeable one. She had ordered a slightly more elaborate meal than usual. Roast beef and vegetables, chicken and salad, curry and rice, cheese, fruit, and coffee, followed each other in due succession. Garth was hungry, for he had walked a long distance that morning and had only partaken of a very slight meal of tea and toast. As he sat at the side of the table near Viola he thought definitely:

“That’s the woman I intend to marry.”

If he had ever contemplated a second marriage he had certainly never remotely imagined that he would meet the woman in this wild sparsely-inhabited district of Ceylon. So few people came thither from the outside world. It wasn’t mentioned in the guide-books. It wasn’t near or on the way to any of the places that globe-trotters wished to see. It wasn’t a district where there was lots going on, like Dimbula or Dickoya, which were strewn with fine bungalows inhabited by wealthy hospitable planters. He had visited some of them during his last stay in Ceylon, and had thought that their abodes in exile had rather resembled English country houses, artistically and even luxuriously furnished, containing treasures too in the shape of old glass and silver and

family portraits, as if the men who possessed them had come to Ceylon with the intention of making their new home as much as possible like the one they had left. And it was something after this fashion that Garth intended to deal with his own bungalow. It was to be a perfect home, with books and pictures, glass, china, and silver, of delicate and rare quality.

After breakfast they returned to the veranda, which was always the coolest part of the house. It was a glorious summer day, and the recent rains had made all the foliage brilliantly fresh and green. The sky was a sheet of sapphire unbroken by a single cloud.

It was very pleasant talking to Viola, although he was unable to re-capture anything of that intimacy which had seemed to spring up between them yesterday. Viola talked chiefly of poor Brett, and of the little local affairs which she thought would interest Garth. Last night his words and manner had alarmed her. She gave him no opportunity now of saying anything in the least personal.

But he liked watching her. She was wonderfully beautiful, soft and girlish and yet so mature, so full of an assurance that made her sometimes seem older than himself.

He stayed on much later than he intended, and suddenly, as they were talking, a shadow fell upon the path just below the steps. Viola sprang up quickly, and exclaimed, "Oh, is that you, Matthew? You must have had a hot ride home!"

Garth rose too.

Something in Matthew's grim impassive face made Viola feel almost guilty. She knew that he would hate to find Sir Garth there, and perhaps he would put an odious interpretation upon his presence.

Matthew's manner as he greeted Garth was not

propitiatory, and the young man was instantly made to feel that he was both unwanted and unwelcome. The knowledge aroused his secret indignation. After all, why should he not come? He was accustomed to being liked and welcomed wherever he went; he had never had an enemy in his life.

Matthew came up the steps.

"Is this an off day with you, Sir Garth?" he inquired, curtly.

"I suppose it is," answered Bennet, coldly. "We haven't started regular work on Madura yet, you know."

He felt that Hudson wished to insult him. The thought enraged him. But because of Mrs. Mansfield's presence he kept an iron hold over himself.

"I am sure you can make Madura a very profitable concern if you choose," continued Hudson, eyeing him ferociously from beneath the jutting shaggy brows. "But if you spend your days in idleness in other men's bungalows, as ninety-nine per cent of the young fellows who come out here do, you'll lose heavily on your investment. Take my advice and stick to Madura for the next few years."

Garth's face was pale with suppressed anger. He drew himself up and answered coolly: "I intend to."

He knew that he was dismissed, that he could never come here again unless he first ascertained that Hudson was away. And even then he might find it impossible to come, for Viola was inclined to yield almost supinely to her brother's mandates. Garth felt he had said so little to-day, and there was so much he still wanted to tell her. . . .

Between them, however, stood this gigantic, massive figure, coarse, brutal, domineering. At that moment Garth almost hated him. He knew that it was in Hudson's power to prevent him from seeing Viola.

"Good-by, Mrs. Mansfield. It was awfully good of you to let me stop. When I've found a decent cook and have got things a bit ship-shape at Madura, you must both come over and breakfast with me. Good-by, Mr. Hudson."

He took up his pith helmet, and strode quickly away. His lithe tall figure was soon lost to sight behind the grove of eucalyptus trees.

When he had disappeared, Matthew turned to his sister.

"He had breakfast here?" he demanded.

"Yes, Matthew."

"You invited him to come?" His voice was loud and fierce.

"He asked if he might. And then I invited him to stay."

The blood surged to his brow. "You invited him to stay, at my expense?"

"If there's any extra expense I will meet it. But please don't make a fuss, Matthew. You know I like having people."

"You're not to have them, then. Do you hear?" He advanced toward her threateningly, and for the moment she thought he actually meant to strike her. "Do you understand? It isn't as if you were to be trusted! I'm here to see that you're not up to your old tricks!"

The insult was almost worse than the blow she had feared. Her face flamed. "How dare you say that to me?"

"Well, it's true isn't it? What about Hilary? The least you can do is to keep quiet! You're making that young fool fall in love with you! The very first eligible man who comes to the district. And the moment my back's turned you have him here. If I ever catch him here again I shall speak plainly to him, and perhaps give him something he won't like.

What you've got to do is to keep yourself to yourself and look after that brat of yours!"

Viola was silent. Matthew's words beat upon her like a succession of scourges that bruised both body and soul. She knew now that he blamed her, that he had always blamed her for the catastrophe of her life. Perhaps he didn't believe the story of the secret marriage, and of her being tricked and duped. How indeed could she make him believe that the whole affair had been planned and executed with all the deadly dexterity of a man whose life had been spent in deceiving an old irascible father?

"Do you hear me, Viola? Do you intend to obey me?" His voice had again assumed a menacing sound.

"I'm in your power, I know," she said, coldly, "so I suppose I shall have to obey you, but if you make things too hard for me I shall go away. At least, I have that remedy."

"I shall not let you go away," said Matthew. "You shall stay here exactly as long as I choose. And I forbid you to have Bennet near the place. You shall not see him. I forbid it!"

He was mortally afraid that Viola, for lack of any other confidant, would some day tell her story to this young man. And he didn't intend to have that shameful episode known throughout the length and breadth of the island. To be discussed in the Colombo and Kandy clubs! No, he had always held his head high, and he wasn't going to be associated with anything so dishonorable.

He went into the bungalow, leaving Viola alone. The stormy interview had exhausted her. She was afraid of Matthew, of his immense physical strength, his bullying ways. She was certain that it had been in his mind to strike her. A blow from him would certainly fell her to the ground. But if

it came to that, she would escape from Kellioya—she and Rebecca and little Hilary. They could hide in those dense dark woods . . . they could get away somehow. Garth Bennet would help her. She knew that she had found a friend in him. She could surely count upon his help. She thought of him pacing the path outside the bungalow through the long hours of the preceding night, a vigilant sentinel. She saw again the tall darkly-silhouetted figure moving up and down, his feet falling crisply on the quartz, that shone like crystals in the moonlight. . . .

One friend in that path shall be
To secure my steps from wrong;
One to count night day for me,
Patient through the watches long
Serving most with none to see. . . .

She pictured him then, tender, chivalrous, forbearing, to the woman he loved. Not to her, of course, never to her, but to some bright happy unshadowed girl. He was young, he would certainly seek another happiness to replace at any rate in part the one he had so cruelly lost.

She wished Matthew hadn't made it so impossible for him to come back to Kellioya, and renew that friendly intercourse which had just begun to be so pleasant, cheering her after the long months of solitude.

Her solitude was indeed more intense and pronounced in the weeks that followed. Matthew did not try to obtain another pupil, and he was too stingy to engage a paid European assistant, which, considering the size of the estate, was almost a necessity. He did all the work himself, and was out early and late, only returning to the bungalow for his meals, when he was always tired and cross and apt to take offense at trifles. But he was a

strong man and inured to the climate, and the extra work did not impair his powerful constitution and physique. He grew, however, more and more morose and misanthropic and scarcely even saw Mr. Keane.

Bennet had apparently accepted his dismissal, for he never approached the bungalow. Viola was thus cut off from all communication with the outside world except for an occasional letter from the Percival Hudsons.

CHAPTER X

THE South West monsoon set in early and with considerable violence during the following May. Part of the road through the jungle had been washed away, and the coolies had to make a considerable détour in order to bring supplies and letters to Kellioya. There were days and nights of wild storms, of thunder and lightning and incessant rain—the heavy tropical rain that descends in gray sheets, and looks as if it had been poured from some giant receptacle.

One afternoon it cleared a little. Matthew had gone down to the factory, where work was in full swing. Viola, who had not left the house for some days, resolved to go for a walk. She put on a mackintosh, coat, and cap and went along the path that led across the hills to the river. She had not once been there since the day of Hartley Brett's death. But she wished to see the Kelli-Oya in its wild mood after these days of rain and tempest.

Fed by innumerable streams from the heights above, the river had overflowed its banks. It was rushing wildly down its new-made course, tossing the discolored spray high in the air. Trunks of trees, great boulders of rock and stone, were swept

onward by those fierce imperious waters, as if they had been trifles of no moment at all. The wooden bridge had been carried away, and but little remained to show where it had once stood.

Viola sat down on a ledge of rock at a little distance from the bank, watching the scene with fascinated eyes. Even there the spray wetted her face and hair. The wind sighed in the grove of keena-trees beyond the river.

The last seven or eight months had passed very quietly and monotonously for her at Kellioya. There had been no outward changes. At Christmas she had begged Matthew to let her go to Nuwara Eliya for a few days; it was so many, many months since she had even heard Mass or been to Confession. But he curtly refused, and seemed to suspect that she had planned a meeting there with Garth Bennet. Sadly she had to give up the idea. It was said that sometimes a priest from one of the Missions would come to stay for a day or two in the neighborhood and say Mass for the benefit of the Catholics there, but since Viola's arrival he had not once been, and the only time she had heard Mass had been when a Jesuit on his travels had quite unexpectedly spent the night at Kuduwatte.

Presently she heard footsteps. The place was lonely, and she wondered who it could be. The steps came with measured tread along the path that ran from the river in the direction of Madura. Yes, and it was here, not far from Brett's bungalow where the two estates joined, that long ago Garth Bennet had asked her to meet him. But of course it was very unlikely that he should come to-day. And she felt almost too desolate to care. These days of pitiless rain, of enforced confinement to the house, had told upon her nerves. She was wasting her youth here at Kellioya, seeing no one but Hilary—too young yet to be a companion—

Rebecca, who grew daily more grim and silent, and Matthew, ill-conditioned, misanthropic, suspicious, tyrannical. There was no consolation anywhere. The tears rushed to her eyes. . . .

She looked up and saw Garth Bennet coming toward her. The smile of pleasure upon his face was very agreeable to a woman who had been shut away so long from any kindly companionship.

"Mrs. Mansfield! What luck!" His boyish voice was very hearty. He gripped her hand in his firm brown one.

Viola smiled, awkwardly conscious of the tears she had not had time to wipe away.

"I say, is anything wrong? You haven't been ill, have you?"

From his great height he looked down into her eyes.

"Oh, I'm never ill. But the wet weather has got on my nerves."

"It's pretty beastly," he agreed, "still it's bearable when you've a personal interest in an adequate monsoon. We've wanted every drop of rain we've had."

He sat down upon a rock near Viola, and together they watched the furious antics of the river.

"I should have been over to see you, for I go out in all weathers, if Mr. Hudson hadn't given me so clearly to understand that he preferred me to remain away," he observed, presently.

"He hates having people," acknowledged Viola, whose loyalty to her brother was now near the breaking-point. "And it's so dreary never seeing anyone."

"Well, he gave me good advice anyhow. When I recovered my temper I resolved to take it. I've been working hard. I'd like you to see my bungalow. And the new coolie-lines too—the old ones were horrible!"

"But the old ones were better than ours," said Viola.

"I've never seen yours, but I shouldn't have thought it was possible for any to be worse than mine," he said, guardedly, for he was aware how ill Matthew housed his labor. "And I think it's every man's duty to take proper care of the people who work for him. I like to think my coolies are well and snug and happy, and have all the rice and betel-nut they can possibly want." His gay laugh rang out like music.

"I'm sure they must be happy," she said.

"And the bungalow—I wish you could see it, Mrs. Mansfield. I've got teak paneling in some of the rooms—it looks topping. I do wish you could persuade Hudson to bring you over."

"I'm afraid it's impossible."

"I should so like your advice about some of the details of the drawing-room. They tell me wall-paper doesn't do out here, it gets damp and peels off. I thought perhaps a cream distemper, and then a shelf with book-cases below, and the pictures hanging just above it. And perhaps I could work in some kind of frieze, as the room is so very lofty. My carpenters are hard at work, and I've had a lot of the stuff sent out from England."

"And you've never been home all this time?" she asked.

His face clouded. "No—I couldn't quite face it, though the little chap still misses me—he hasn't forgotten Daddy. You're lucky to have your baby with you."

"Yes," she agreed. "But I should never have come without her."

"I may go home for a bit in August or September. Then I should stay for the shooting. And perhaps next winter I might bring Kenneth out for a few months."

"It must be lovely to go home, even for a few months. Especially if you've a home waiting for you," she said.

"Yes, but Stonewood isn't what it was. I've never felt settled there since my wife died. But of course I can't be away forever, though my brother-in-law looks after it well. He's living there—he's my sister's husband—and they've got three ripping kiddies, who keep Kenneth company. I say, Mrs. Mansfield, don't you think you might walk across to Madura? Now—I mean?" His face colored a little as he made this bold request.

"Oh, no," she said, quickly, "and there isn't time. I must be getting back—Matthew will be wondering what's become of me." There was some confusion in her manner, as if the suggestion had startled her. She was about to rise but Garth stretched out a detaining hand.

"No, don't go, please. I haven't seen you for such ages. And I . . . I've wanted so to see you. I've hoped and hoped we might meet—just like this—by chance." There was no mistaking now the desperate earnestness of his voice. "So don't go until you've promised at least that you'll come again. Very soon—in the afternoon, just about this time. And if we were to meet a little farther down beyond the bend of the river, it would be even safer than this."

She looked at him with that cool grave gaze of hers. So calm, so almost maternal, as if he had been a pleading boy.

"Perhaps I may. But I can't promise. You mustn't count upon it."

"I shall count upon it, though," he said, eagerly. "Mrs. Mansfield—it's beginning to matter most frightfully to me whether I see you or not."

He had risen now and was standing before her.

"You mustn't let it matter," she answered. Her

face and voice were sad, as if the remembrance of a past sorrow were affecting her now. That marriage of hers! He ground his teeth.

He felt that somehow too she was pitying him. Pitying him perhaps because she guessed that he was beginning to love her.

Dusk was falling now, wrapping the mountains in dim blue veils. The rain had quite ceased, and the summits of the hills were clear of cloud, though in the clefts and hollows the vapor lay like thick white scarves.

Viola rose to her feet. "Good-by," she said, putting out her hand.

He held it. "No, don't go. Or at least let me walk a little way with you."

"Only a very little way, then. You mustn't come far. It would only make trouble between me and my brother if he were to see us."

"But does that matter? You aren't dependent upon him, surely?"

"I am dependent upon him for a home for myself and Hilary."

"A home! In the wilds of Ceylon? Where you're buried alive?" he said, in angry scorn.

"Ah, but that's just what I want . . . To be buried alive," she said, and it seemed to him that her sadness for the first time held something of bitterness.

They walked together slowly to the top of the hill. Across the intervening plantations of tea they could see the lights of Hudson's bungalow shining like golden stars through the dusk. The hills behind it rose darkly, covered thickly with the dense jungle, that seemed to make them one with the night.

"Don't come any farther, please," said Viola. "Good-night."

"Good-night," said Bennet, reluctantly. But

when he took her hand in farewell, he dragged it to his lips and kissed it. They looked into each other's eyes. And in her face he seemed to see joy mingled with fear.

"Don't think of me—" she broke out, suddenly. Then she left his side and walked quickly onward.

She was late in getting home, much later than she had intended to be. If Matthew had returned from the factory, he would wonder what had become of her and why she had not been there as usual to give him his tea. She was afraid, too, that he might come out to meet her. All the time she had been with Garth, she had feared that Matthew might appear in search of her.

In the garden she met her brother. He was evidently waiting for her.

"Been for a walk?" he said, eying her suspiciously.

"Yes, Matthew. I was tired of being shut up in the house for so long."

"Did you meet anyone?"

"Yes—Sir Garth Bennet." She looked him straight in the eyes as she spoke. For months his name had not been mentioned between them.

"Oh, that young fool! How's his wonderful rubber getting on?"

"He didn't mention it." She turned away and went into the house. Matthew watched her.

"So he's not choked off yet," he said to himself. "Well, if I catch him hanging round here, I'll give him the biggest thrashing he's ever had."

For the next few days Viola was conscious that her brother was keeping her under his eye. Evidently his suspicions had been aroused. She resented this usurpation of an authority to which he had no right, but she was compelled to accept the petty insulting suspicion as part of the price she had

to pay for living in his house. It was a comfort to feel that Hilary—such a delicate baby at first—was thriving in the pure delicious mountain air of Ceylon. She was as plump and rosy as any English baby could possibly be. This more than anything helped to reconcile Viola to the solitude of her lot. She lived for her child and between the two there existed a deep love. Hilary adored her mother; she liked and respected Rebecca, recognizing that she was not a person to be trifled with, and she had an instinctive dislike to her Uncle Matthew. He didn't care for children and he was deeply ashamed of Hilary's origin. He wondered Viola should be so proud of her. It was as if the child were in some measure conscious of his antagonism.

Sometimes in the days that followed, Viola had a queer longing to walk down to the river and seek the spot indicated by Bennet, just beyond the bend where the Kelli-Oya flowed into the Madura property. She wondered if he were waiting there, perhaps every evening at the same hour, destined to be disappointed. But she was afraid that if the meeting took place Matthew would hear of it. She could not risk a scene between the two men. Hudson was rather less tall than Bennet, but he was much heavier and far more powerful.

Besides, Matthew's suspicions were undoubtedly aroused. There was no chance of escaping his vigilance.

Her outlook had changed a little since that last meeting with Garth. He had made things different for her. She didn't want to leave Kellioya. The matchless beauty of her surroundings wove spells about her. The knowledge that this man's love was beginning to be hers, gave her a certain sense of ease and well-being. She was no longer quite friendless. The heart that Esmé Craye had broken and crushed seemed to move and stir again.

CHAPTER XI

ONE day Viola received a little note from Mr. Keane, telling her that he was expecting the priest, Father O'Farrell, to spend a few days with him. Mass would be said in the little chapel down by the river just beyond Hartley Brett's old bungalow, on the following morning as well as on Sunday and the two succeeding days. Except for Rebecca, Viola was the only European Catholic in the district. Matthew had an Eurasian conductor of Portuguese descent who was a Catholic, and of course many of the coolies belonged to the old Faith. Notice was sent round to the estates in the neighborhood, and provision was made for the coolies to attend, especially on the Sunday. Keane added in his letter that he had made arrangements to have tea and coffee ready after Mass for those who attended—it would be served by Matthew's permission in the little bungalow. Keane was aware that practically every member of the little Catholic community around Kellioya would attend Mass fasting. And Father O'Farrell would be busy all day long, visiting the sick, and hearing confessions.

Mass was at half past six, and it was scarcely light when Viola and Rebecca emerged from the bungalow and started forth on their walk to the river. They had left Hilary in charge of a faithful old ayah who was perfectly trustworthy but inclined to be injudicious in the matter of giving her things to eat.

Matthew met the two women on his way to muster; he gave his sister a curt good-morning and passed on.

The little chapel had been built many years ago by a devout Catholic who had lived at Madura. After his death its furniture had been removed to

another church in a more populous district, and for a time Church of England services had been held there. Now it was never used except for Mass, and the Church of England services were held in Mr. Keane's bungalow.

The building had rather fallen into decay. There was little left now in the way of interior decoration. There was an altar, but the altar stone had been removed with the rest of the furnishings. The priest invariably brought his own portable altar with him. A great crucifix still hung there on the blackened peeling walls; there was an ancient confessional that had suffered from the depredations of white ants, and over the door could still be seen a half-obliterated roughly-executed fresco of Our Lady of Good Counsel, to whom the chapel had been dedicated. Viola had often visited the poor little place in passing, had knelt to pray in the crazy benches, and had felt a compassion for its desolation, its moldy decay. Everywhere the destructive energy of the white ants was visible, combining with the damp and neglect to render the building less and less fitted for its holy and solemn use.

When she entered it that morning with Rebecca, she found the chapel almost full of people though it was still quite early. There were quite a number of coolies present, men, women and children; a few Eurasians, and kneeling in the front bench two Europeans. Viola saw at once they were Mr. Keane and Garth Bennet. She and Rebecca made their confessions, and then knelt down at a side bench. Presently the priest came in and walked up to the altar, accompanied by two little native boys as acolytes.

Viola thought that the Holy Sacrifice in all its solemn simplicity gained rather than lost in those forlorn surroundings. There was so much devotion in the congregation. Everyone in the chapel except

the two Englishmen received Holy Communion. Bennet watched Viola almost enviously as she went up to the rails with Rebecca following her. She knelt there with bowed head. He remembered her prayers by Brett's death-bed; it seemed to him that he could still hear her saying, *Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, I trust in Thee*. He had sometimes found himself half-unconsciously repeating those words aloud in the solitude of Madura, and always they had brought a message of hope, and had been an incentive to prayer.

It has often been said that the wonderful music, the fragrance of the incense, constitute the most potent attractions of the Catholic Church, yet surely never can the Divine Sacrifice make such an instant and powerful appeal as when it is offered in surroundings at once humble and poor, stripped of all adjuncts of music and incense, celebrated perhaps in upper room or barn, as if to recall the fact that Bethlehem, the first House of Bread, had only offered a humble stable for the reception of her Divine Master.

It was the first time that Garth Bennet had ever been present at Mass, and he could not deny that he was profoundly affected by it. He was glad that Keane had suggested he should accompany him. He had dined and slept at Kuduwatte last night, and at dinner had met Father O'Farrell, a simple, earnest, zealous missionary priest.

When Mass was over, Viola did not at once rise from her knees. She wanted to savor these moments of sanctifying grace, and as she knelt there she made an offering of all that was antipathetic and difficult in her present life. The loneliness and solitude that were so unnecessary, since she could have had friends if Matthew would have permitted it; the absence of any relief or distraction, all the things indeed against which her youth rebelled.

She saw now that this might well be one of those shaping-times for the soul that are so terrible in their apparent deadly monotony, and yet so necessary for its spiritual development.

She was the last to leave the chapel, and accompanied by Rebecca she walked on to Hartley Brett's old bungalow. There she found quite a little party of people all partaking of tea or coffee, toast and plantains, the simple meal which Mr. Keane in his forethought had provided. Keane and Bennet sat at one side of the table, and on the other were Father O'Farrell and the Eurasian conductor. The democracy of the Church was visible here in the little assemblage, for planters and their Eurasian assistants never as a rule have meals in common.

Viola and the priest were introduced to each other, but there was little conversation at that early hour. Father O'Farrell told her, however, that the Blessed Sacrament would remain in the Tabernacle during the three or four days of his visit; he gave her a key of the chapel and told her to come whenever she could. She resolved that she would spend long hours there, and that sometimes she would bring little Hilary.

Garth waited on her, bringing her coffee and toast and jam. He seemed to realize that she didn't want to talk, that she hadn't quite emerged from the effect of that mystical holy hour through which she had just passed. And he envied her, her faith, yes, and something more. Her faith in the Catholic Church; her possession of that wonderful spiritual heritage. "I wish I'd had that to give to Kenneth," he thought.

He felt that this religion of hers enhanced her charm and deepened that touch of mystery he was unable to separate from her. It was part of her, a beautiful, inalienable part.

To-day she was dressed entirely in black—a thin

filmy black. He had never seen her in black before, and it gave him the impression that he was seeing her from a new angle. It suited her to perfection, accentuating the pallid oval of her face, the shadows of her hair.

"Well, we ought to be going, Bennet," said Mr. Keane, rising. "We're late as it is."

Garth got up a little reluctantly. As he said good-by to Viola, he said in a low tone: "I suppose you will come again to-morrow?"

"Yes, I hope to come every day," she answered.

The conductor also departed and so did Rebecca, leaving Viola alone with Father O'Farrell.

"I shall hear confessions all this afternoon and up till ten o'clock to-night," said the priest. "There are so many stragglers from the other estates that haven't come in yet. Sir Garth has kindly promised to see about his own coolies."

Father O'Farrell had been in his box since five o'clock that morning, and had had a constant stream of penitents.

He knew little of Viola's story, beyond the mere fact that she was living apart from her husband. Keane had told him this, and they had discussed the loneliness of her position in her brother's house at Kellioya. Last night at dinner he had met Bennet for the first time, and had learned from him the story of young Brett's death. It showed him that Mrs. Mansfield's simple prayers had made a very profound impression upon the young Protestant, who had stood there listening.

Sometimes an episode of that kind had been known to turn a man's thoughts almost with violence, to the Catholic Church. All priests are aware that the Holy Spirit makes powerful use of simple, common things to effect His wonderful purposes and arrest wandering souls. It might even be that Bennet would prove to be permanently in-

fluenced by that scene, and by the simple ejaculatory prayer he had faithfully carried in his heart ever since.

Viola went down alone that afternoon to pray in the chapel. Spiritually starved as she was at Kellioya, this time of prayer and meditation was like a golden interlude, and it passed only too quickly. At first Father O'Farrell had been there, confessing penitents, but he was called away to a case of sickness, and she was left alone. Dusk filled the little building. A glint of gold shone from the crown of Our Lady of Good Counsel. A red lamp burned before the Tabernacle upon the altar, and made a vivid point of ruby light in the gloom. She felt the Divine Presence very near then. So close to her . . . so intimately concerned with all her trials, hopes, aspirations, failures. Waiting, listening, appealing, out here in this lonely place among the Ceylon mountains.

It was a long time before Father O'Farrell returned, but it had not seemed long to Viola. When he came in he genuflected and then approached her.

"I've come to relieve you now, Mrs. Mansfield. You must be tired."

She lifted her face. "Oh, no, I'm not tired."

She rose from her knees and genuflected, bowing her head as she did so. Although it was now dark she went away reluctantly. She would have liked to remain watching all night, like some nun of the Perpetual Adoration.

Outside, the night scene was very peaceful. The dark blue dusk filled the world; overhead a star or two flickered. The silence was broken only by the steady flow of the river, the sougning of wind in the keena-trees. She stood for a few minutes by the banks of the Kelli-Oya, watching the white swift flow of the water, pallid, luminous. As she neared the place where the bridge had been washed away

she saw Garth Bennet. There was no mistaking his tall figure although she could not see his face.

"May I walk with you, Mrs. Mansfield?"

Viola would have preferred the solitary walk; the mystical atmosphere of the little chapel still possessed her, and the human interruption jarred a little. But she felt that Bennet had perhaps been waiting there for a considerable time in the hope of being allowed to accompany her part of the way home.

"Please let me," he said, aware that she hesitated. "I have something to say."

"You must not come far, then," said Viola.

She had a curious dread of meeting Matthew, feeling that it would inevitably precipitate a quarrel between the two men.

They climbed the hill in silence. On each side of them the low bushes of tea stretched away apparently for miles in their neat symmetrical rows. It was dark, the path was very narrow, Bennet sometimes put out his hand and touched Viola's arm lightly in order to guide her.

The little contact gave him courage for he said abruptly:

"I know you're a Catholic and that your Church is very strict about marriage. But isn't there *any* hope of your being able to get yours dissolved? You see, I want to marry you. I want you to be my wife."

He stopped; his voice was choked with emotion.

Viola's heart beat a little faster. But she did not feel able then to tell him the story of her so-called marriage. She had never told anyone except her two brothers, and she felt that to know the truth would destroy Garth's love for her, just as the moment when it was beginning to count for something in her own life. She knew, by this little fear which till now she had cherished unconsciously,

that she had begun to care for him. His gentleness, his courtesy, his devotion had touched her. He was unlike any man she had ever known. He was utterly without Esmé's brutal almost ill-bred egoism that had not hesitated to immolate her youth, just as he was without Matthew's rough coarse manners and point of view. But she longed, even while she feared, to tell him that she was perfectly free, that there existed no barrier such as he believed between them.

"I couldn't marry you," she said, quietly.

"Yes, yes, I know that as things are it isn't possible. I'm the last to wish you to do anything that your religion forbids—I've seen and known what it means to you. . . . But can nothing be done? You were only seventeen, were you not? You could hardly have known what you were doing—you must have been most cruelly taken in!"

"I was quite old enough to know that I was offending Almighty God by disobeying the laws of His Church," she said, seriously; "even at the time I felt that I should be punished—that I deserved to be punished. You see, I was brought up to realize that whenever one did wrong there would inevitably be—punishment. . . ."

"Punishment! You poor child . . ." he said, compassionately. "I only wish I could bear it for you. I'd do anything in the world for you." He clasped her hand in his and held it with a firm pressure. "Let's try at least," he said; "you might ask Father O'Farrell if there isn't a way out, just the ghost of a hope . . . Viola, we could be married and live at Madura while we're both young enough to enjoy this free colonial life. And I'd have the boy out—the children could play together. We could have such a happy perfect home, you and I, and Kenneth and Hilary."

Hilary . . . The word seemed to smite her.

She withdrew her hand, and said in a cold, proud tone, "Can you keep a secret? A secret only known to four people?"

"Of course I can!"

He must know the truth, and it would be easier to tell it to him now under cover of the kindly darkness.

"I was never married," she said, simply.

Garth fell back a little. She knew then that she had dealt him a wholly unexpected blow. She was free—there was nothing to prevent their marriage—but would he want to marry her, now that he knew to the full her shame and dishonor? She went on quietly but her voice held a deadly precision.

"Hilary is an illegitimate child. Now you know why I live here with Matthew, why I try to be patient, to bear everything, to do as he wishes. He has given us a home." There was the least suspicion now of a break in her voice.

Garth was still speechless. It seemed to him incredible. A woman too with such profound faith, who could pray as Viola prayed. She had seemed to him in the chapel that morning little less than a saint.

"I can't believe it!" he cried. "It can't be true!" He looked at her in anguish.

"It's quite true. I went through a ceremony of marriage—I was, you see, very ignorant about Protestant ceremonies. I thought it was all right—I believed that our marriage was at least legal. It was only some weeks later that I learned it was an elaborate hoax."

"Who was this man?"

"I can't tell you. I have never told anyone. Even Matthew doesn't know."

"He could have been made to marry you. Why didn't you ask advice?"

"I could have married him. I . . . I refused."

"*Refused?*" Through all his indignation she could detect a note of incredulity. "What made you refuse?"

"It meant renouncing my religion. Not only for myself but for Hilary," she said, in a low tone.

They moved slowly onward up the pale quartz-strewn path. Garth was pondering over the terrible little story she had just revealed to him. She had been deceived—by some scoundrel. Someone whom she had perhaps loved with that first heedless love of young girlhood. Then an ugly little doubt seized him. Was the story true? Somehow in spite of himself, in spite too of his love for her, he knew that his idol was smirched with a little dust. It no longer possessed that brilliant whiteness. She had passed in Ceylon for a woman who was separated from her husband, perhaps thinking that this version of the story would keep her from all molestation. Men knowing she was a Catholic would thus be less likely to approach her with offers of marriage, believing that she was not free to marry. But he in his eager love had sought to break down the barrier—the wholly imaginary barrier—that divided them. And then he had been called upon to listen to this ugly little story of dishonor and shame. His pity at that moment was more for Hilary than for Viola. What would the future of such a child be? They could hardly let her marry without disclosing the story of her mother's shame.

"Who was this man?" he repeated, almost with violence. "Mrs. Mansfield—Viola—I insist upon your telling me!" His voice rang out with a sharp note of authority; she recoiled before it.

"I can never tell you. I've told you my secret—try to forget it. Try—" she turned and looked at him swiftly, "to forget *me!*"

So she had foreseen that her confession even if it did not kill his love would assuredly change it.

"I could never forget you," he said, "I love you too much for that." He had the feeling that his heart must be broken. Something more bitter than death divided them. Death is indeed one of the kindest of separators; it seldom leaves any bitterness, only the pure sorrow of loss that enshrines the perfect image without flaw.

"You must forget me," she said, very tranquilly. "You see how impossible it would be for you to marry me. People would continually be asking questions about my first husband and how long he had been dead! People always ask questions of that kind, you know—you don't notice them unless you have something to hide."

"Why must it be such a secret? All the world ought to know his odious, infamous name!"

"I could never tell you," she repeated.

"If you married me, you would have to give me the right—the power—to confirm your story!"

It was unwise to speak thus, and he felt even in the darkness that she shuddered and shivered, as if he had wounded her very flesh.

"Oh, you don't believe me, then?" she stammered.

Already he was going from her, already his thoughts of her were touched with a subtle poison. Perhaps he had cherished some foolish but perfect and peerless image of her in his heart and he was now envisaging its slow definite defacement.

"I want to believe you, Viola," he said, eagerly, "but this has made a difference—I should be deceiving you if I didn't tell you so at once. I must think it over."

His words flicked at her pride. "Please leave me—there's really nothing for you to think over. I couldn't marry you—as far as I'm concerned the whole thing is utterly finished. So don't torture me now with your doubts and disbeliefs."

And he had asked what was tantamount to a proof of her story! . . .

She hurried down the hill. As she went he seemed to catch the faint sound of her sobbing. He turned abruptly away. He did not dare follow her to comfort her. But he knew that but for this her love might have been his, just as his own was most surely hers.

Hilary stood between them. It wasn't likely that she would ever consent to part with Hilary; she adored the child too much. With some women, and she perhaps was one, no child was ever so dear as the first-born. It was not only dearer but it was different. But on the other hand how impossible it would be for him to have Hilary under his roof evoking eternal questionings. . . .

"Hilary Mansfield? Oh, was Lady Bennet married before? What Mansfield? Any relation to—?"

And he could almost hear a malicious feminine voice answering unctuously: "Ah, my dear, she never speaks of her first marriage, and you may depend there's some mystery . . ."

CHAPTER XII

GARTH walked slowly back to Madura. In these few months of residence he had transformed the place beyond belief. It was extraordinarily perfect, and as he entered it that night its beauty seemed to welcome him. The walls of his study—too high for easy decoration as walls almost always are in the East—were cream-washed, and all round the room there was a paneling of teak to the height of four feet. The panels were very beautifully carved with that precision and symmetry of design and execution which is the peculiar quality

of native work. Above this paneling, but not more than a foot above, hung his pictures, water-colors and proof-etchings by men whose names were then beginning to be famous. There were some good Oriental rugs on the parquet floor. People had shaken their heads over his parquet, reminding him of those traditional devourers, the white ants, but Garth had told his critics with a gay shrug of the shoulders that nothing lasted forever. In two recesses beside the open fire-place—for fires are often necessary in the evening at those altitudes—there were two tall narrow book-cases filled with books. The furniture was beautiful, and there were some large comfortable easy chairs and sofas. There was a table covered with English newspapers, carefully folded. The whole thing was as much like England as he could make it, and he was beginning to be pleased and satisfied with the result of his efforts. There was a room at Stonewood very like this one. And it was ready—ready and waiting for Viola. But his dream of forming a group there with their two children had been abruptly and cruelly shattered. He couldn't have Hilary with them. People didn't. It wasn't possible. Sooner or later these things got out. A slip of the tongue—a false step—nothing was easier or more irrevocable. And his mother and sisters would naturally ask questions concerning his wife's first marriage. To-night he began to realize the improbability of Viola's ever entering Madura as his wife. She wouldn't give up her child—what woman worthy of the name would do such a thing? And he shrank from Hilary with her strange green eyes. His mind was confused, his thoughts were in a strange whirl. Perhaps he didn't really love Viola, after all. If he truly cared for her, surely he would be prepared to make sacrifices in order to win her for his wife. He must keep away from her for the present, until

he had made perfectly certain of his love. When she had said to him, "I was never married," he had felt as if something had snapped in his heart. He had felt too that he was looking upon a strange sinister woman who had ensnared him. For her story on the face of it was so utterly incredible. From beginning to end so unlikely. Such things as sham ceremonies of marriage couldn't really take place in these days! The dreadful little doubt still remained in his mind.

She had blamed herself only in so far as she had disobeyed the laws of her Church. But that sacrifice she had made for Hilary—it was inconceivable! To refuse marriage when she knew that a child was going to be born to her? . . . He tried to believe it and failed. Yet she seemed to accept her punishment so simply, this punishment that was expressed in her solitude, the monotony of her life with her uncongenial, ill-conditioned brother.

All Garth's chivalry had been stirred at the sight of this woman—so young, almost a girl. He had wanted to rescue her, to bring back love and happiness to her life. She was to have come here, to this place of peace, so that they might both build anew after the storms and shipwrecks of the past. They could have led a beautiful ordered life, here at Madura. But his dreams were shattered. She was free—there was nothing to prevent their marriage taking place as soon as the formalities could be completed. The supposititious obstacle had been dissolved. And yet they were farther apart than they had ever been. Of course he had been cruel in his first pain at hearing the truth. She had been reduced to breaking-point by his undisguised incredulity. That cry of hers: "Don't torture me with your doubts and disbeliefs," had appalled him, with its naked bitterness. It was like looking at a soul on fire. . . .

Because he had been so quickly capable of making her suffer, he believed that she must in some measure at least return his love. Otherwise, surely, he would not have had this power to hurt her.

"I must have time to think it over," he said. He rose and stepped out into the veranda and went round to the other side of the house. From this point he could see the hill upon which Matthew's bungalow stood. Above Kellioya the Southern Cross burned like a group of immense lamps. Fireflies tangled the low shrubs of the garden. There was a scent of roses and jessamine. He could hear the barking of jackals in the distance, the hooting of an owl in flight. The low steady murmur of running water reached him, the voice of the Kelli-Oya, subsiding now after these few days of fine weather.

"I can't live without her—I can't," he said, staring at the scene with haggard eyes.

He wouldn't of course go to Mass in the chapel to-morrow. But he could picture her there, just as he had seen her this morning, her slight black-clad form, her pale veiled face, that immature girlish look of hers. . . . And then afterward the little meal in poor young Brett's bungalow, where he had first seen her. His thoughts went back swiftly to the morning of Brett's death. Her prayers . . . He had believed then in her absolute holiness. A woman must surely be a saint to pray like that, so simply, without any suggestion of cant. In the universal shipwreck that had overwhelmed him, engulfing him with fierce waves, he seemed to be plunging his hands downward toward a lost Atlantis, lying concealed beneath that cruel sea, crying, crying, Viola's name. . . .

It was a relief to Viola that Garth was not present in the chapel on the following morning. She hoped indeed that for the present he would keep

out of her sight as much as even Matthew could possibly desire. It was not that she loved him, but she had certainly come very close to loving him. There was something in his youth and ardor that appealed to her. She had even, after their conversation by the river the other evening, seriously considered the question of a possible marriage with him, realizing that she would thus secure a settled home for herself and Hilary with a man whom she would surely learn to love most deeply and gratefully. Not perhaps with the same sense of worship she had felt for Esmé—that was an emotion that seldom manifested itself more than once in any lifetime. And it did not always spell either happiness or permanence. Her own disillusionment had been very complete, and she was aware that nothing could ever stir those dead ashes to flame.

But that picture of securing a home for herself and her child had abruptly faded. Viola had seen only too clearly the effect her little confession had made upon Garth Bennet. In his sharp and undisguised recoil, she felt that he had represented both the opinion and the attitude the world would display if it ever learned the truth about her story. It was indeed the thought that this attitude was a representative one, that had scourged her into that final appeal for mercy and silence. She had cried out under the pain. She had run from him sobbing, ashamed that he should see her tears.

Her confession had been a most hideous surprise to him. In his own suffering he had hurt her too. He hadn't believed her. Women, placed as she was, always tried to make out a good case for themselves. It was his sudden shrewd look of incredulity that had stabbed her to the heart.

“Do you think I could go to Colombo next week

for a little?" Viola asked her brother at breakfast on the following day.

"What on earth do you want to go there for?" he growled.

"I want a change. I . . . I don't feel well."

"You look perfectly well. If you would only occupy yourself a little more it would be better for you. But you live here in absolute idleness."

"I do all there is to do. But seriously, Matthew—I should like to go to Colombo for a few days."

"Well, I can't let you have the money," said Matthew, in a tone of great decision.

"Oh, I can pay if it comes to that. I should take Hilary and Rebecca and stay quite a fortnight."

"It's perfect nonsense! And hotels are very expensive. You'd be writing to me for more money in no time. Besides, I won't have you gadding about Colombo alone. You'll have Bennet following you. Don't you suppose I've got eyes in my head?"

Viola listened in apparent patience. She sat there quite motionless. She did not change color at the mention of Bennet's name.

"So put the idea out of your head at once," added Matthew.

"Matthew—" she said, desperately, "I'm sorry—but I mean to go. You've always thwarted me whenever I've suggested having a little change. But this time it's absolutely necessary. Of course if you don't want to have us back you must say so."

She spoke in a cold decided tone.

"Does Bennet know of this famous plan?" sneered Matthew.

"He certainly does not."

"When did you last see him?"

"Yesterday."

"I told you I wouldn't have you meeting him!"

"You should have told him, then, that you didn't wish him to come to Mass yesterday morning."

"He went there to see you, I suppose!"

"Matthew—this plan of mine only concerns myself. I'm sick to death of Kellioya—I must go away for a little. You can't prevent me. You needn't have us back if you don't like."

Matthew, however, had no wish that his sister should leave Kellioya permanently. He needed the money she paid so regularly for her own keep, and Rebecca's and Hilary's. It relieved him of so much outgoing expense. His hoard in the Colombo bank was steadily swelling. But at the same time he was resolved not to yield to these entreaties and allow her to go to Colombo. She would come back more discontented than ever. And he couldn't let her go there alone. She was far too frank and friendly in her attitude toward strangers. He had noticed it with Keane and with Hartley Brett, and with this young fool, Garth Bennet, confound him! And if she stayed at the hotel with only her little girl and Rebecca, she would certainly be noticed, people would ask who she was, they would inevitably try to scrape up acquaintance with her. She wasn't a person that could easily be overlooked. All men admired her, and he himself could see that she might be thought beautiful, with that aspect of hers at once so girlish and so queenly.

"You can't possibly stay at hotels by yourself!"

"My dear Matthew, what do you suppose I did all that year I was alone in Italy?"

"Well, I don't think you'd better make a boast of that," said Hudson, darkly.

She flushed. He never missed an opportunity of wounding her, of showing her how little she was to be trusted. But she drew herself up quickly and said:

"As a matter of fact I'm not going to a hotel. I'm going to stay with Mrs. Monk—the one I met on board ship coming out. I don't know her well,

but she was kind when Hilary was ill, and sometimes she has written to me and suggested my going there."

"Monk? I don't know the name!"

"Her husband's in a shipping firm—they have a bungalow near the sea."

"But she may not be there. And if she is there she may not want you. People often give those general invitations, but they never mean them to be followed up."

"I heard from her last week. She said again she wished I would go. Her husband's away at Trinco, and she's alone."

"Then why didn't you want to go last week?" inquired Matthew.

Viola was silent. It is true that last week she had not wished so passionately to leave Kellioya. The letter had come just after her meeting with Bennet that rainy evening by the river, when she was beginning to realize what a difference his friendship made to her lonely life, how precious it was. And it had just put forth a new little shoot. After months of separation they had seen each other again. But she had not then anticipated that their friendship would come to such an abrupt, tragic conclusion, would be so speedily wrecked, as friendships between men and women so often are, on the wild breakers of love. If only he had not fallen in love with her, asked her to marry him, shown her such a tempting picture of domestic peace at Madura, and thus elicited that little shameful confession from her! . . . And he had taken it very badly. She could see in his face the sudden revulsion of feeling which he had not been able to repress. She knew that she had fallen in his estimation from a great height. The affair was finished, but it had wounded her deeply. She was still sore

and smarting from his words of dismay and incredulity and bitterness.

"I didn't feel as if I wanted to go until now," she told Matthew.

"Let's hear what's changed your mind!" He leaned back and looked at her with that queer expression, at once ferocious and suspicious, in his small furtive eyes, set so deeply beneath the shaggy prominent eyebrows.

Viola did not answer. She was eating an orange and appeared to be absorbed in the task of peeling it.

"Has it got anything to do with Bennet?" demanded Matthew. "I insist upon knowing! I shall ask him what he's about soon!" His eyes almost vanished now under the penthouse brows.

Viola was still silent.

"You can't deceive me," he continued, raising his voice a little. "You've been seen walking with him after dark—more than once. People have recognized you and told me." He flung the words at her with a kind of triumph.

"I'd no idea you were having me watched!" she said.

"I don't trust either you or Bennet—I could see what he was after from the first moment he set eyes on you. Can you deny that you've met him more than once by the river—that he's walked back with you under cover of darkness? You have encouraged his attentions. I'm not going to have it, Viola. If I catch him I shall thrash him soundly. I'll soon teach him which is the better man."

"You are quite unbearable, Matthew," she said, coolly. "And I'm going to Colombo as soon as possible—I want to get away from your brutality for a little while. And if you don't want us back you can say so. I'm of age now, and if I'm hard

up I can sell some of my capital. We shan't starve. . . ."

She rose from the table and went out of the room. She was beginning to realize that this was the only threat that had any weight with Matthew. He didn't want her to go away. He liked her money too well. She could always bring him to his senses by saying that she would leave Kellioya for good. He might hate her and Hilary, but he preferred to keep them there, his slaves and prisoners.

She dreaded a meeting between the two men. Bennet had a passionate temper, kept nevertheless well under control; he would be little likely to endure any insult from Matthew with forbearance. Then she reflected with sudden bitterness that Garth would be less likely than ever to approach the bungalow now. He might even see reason in Matthew's close jealous custody of his sister. She felt that Garth would no longer be so completely on her side. Even if he pitied her, he would still be able to perceive justice in Matthew's methods. The thought stung her. She had been a fool to speak—it would have been so easy to refuse him without going into any particulars. . . .

No, it wouldn't have been easy. If only after that confession he had still cared, still believed in her, she would to-night be the happiest woman in the world, knowing that soon she would be his wife. . . .

Herself and Garth; Hilary and Kenneth. The free sweet life at Madura. . . . Yes, she had wanted it for herself and Hilary. And then the sudden change in his voice and manner when he had learned the truth! . . . It had taught her the measure of his abrupt disillusionment. . . .

"Rebecca," she called, softly for fear of waking Hilary.

"Yes, ma'am."

"I'm going to Colombo on Tuesday. You and Hilary are to come, too."

Rebecca's thin grim face softened a little. Nearly two years of unmitigated Kellioya had secretly tried even her fidelity to breaking point.

"We shall be there a fortnight or three weeks. It'll be nice there now—it's just the time people go back."

"Yes, ma'am."

"We shall stay with Mrs. Monk—she has a beautiful bungalow near the sea. Oh, Rebecca, won't it be lovely to be able to go to Mass any day we like?"

"It will indeed, ma'am."

"We shall only want very thin things. Take all Baby's frocks, Rebecca."

"Very well, ma'am."

Viola related the little history of that evening's happenings to Father O'Farrell in the confessional, and he advised her strongly to leave Kellioya for a few weeks. It would be better for both Garth and herself that she should go away for a time. The change too would be beneficial; she had lived too long away from daily Mass and all the help and consolation that the Sacraments of the Church can bestow.

She went to Mass on the two succeeding days with Rebecca, and, despite the preparations for the journey, she contrived also to spend an hour or two daily before the lonely Tabernacle in the little chapel, choosing always that time when the priest was least likely to be there, so that the Blessed Sacrament might not be left in complete solitude.

She arranged to start early on the Tuesday morning, so as to avoid the great heat of the day. The journey through the jungle was to be accomplished in carrying-chairs, a method of transit which she

disliked very much, as it always gave her a sensation of nausea with its slow and swaying movement. But Matthew was still so much opposed to her going that she did not venture to ask for the loan of his pony. A carriage had been ordered to meet the little party at the road, just above the Hilgalla Rocks—a group of fine gray cliffs with green turfed summits that made such a famous landmark for many miles round, beyond the hills of Kellioya.

Hudson was aware of these preparations, but he offered no help; he was resolved not to encourage his sister in this costly whim of hers. He was still obsessed with the notion that she was going to Colombo to meet someone. And who could that person be but Garth Bennet?

That evening, after her departure, he was walking down by the river when he met Mr. Keane and Garth Bennet. As it was impossible to avoid them, he greeted them with a kind of morose civility.

"I hear Mrs. Mansfield's gone to Colombo," said Keane, in his pleasant cheery voice. "I've thought for some time past that she's needed a change."

Matthew's brow lowered. "If she's ever wanted a change before she's never said so," he answered. "It's just a sudden whim." He stared almost insolently at Garth as if he suspected him of having inspired Viola with this wish to go to Colombo. Probably he meant to follow her thither at the earliest possible opportunity.

"Oh, you can't keep women away from shops forever," said Keane.

"Oh—shops—!" said Hudson, contemptuously. The idea was nevertheless excessively distasteful to him, and he inwardly hoped that Viola would not spend too much of her time and substance in the famous stores of Colombo, nor even in the Pettah with its fascinating bazaars and seductive native wares.

"Is she staying at the G.O.H.?" inquired Keane, using the abbreviation by which the Grand Oriental Hotel is known all over Ceylon—a country where a curious custom of alluding to both men and places by their initials rather than by their names, prevails.

"No—I should never have allowed her to do that. She is staying with a friend of hers, a Mrs. Monk."

"Oh, a very charming woman," said Keane, "I've known her for many years. They have a delightful bungalow near the sea at Kollupitiya."

"I lunched with her once when I was in Colombo," said Garth, speaking for the first time.

"I don't know her," said Matthew. "I've never wasted my time in rushing off to Colombo—detestable place! You might as well live in a Turkish bath."

Keane laughed. "Ah, but we haven't all got your misanthropic tastes, Hudson," he said, rallyingly.

Matthew had never learned to take "chaff." He said "Good-evening" abruptly, and turned away. Mentally he resolved to put a watcher down by Hilgalla Rocks on the morrow to see if Garth left the district. It was unlikely he would go by any other route, for if he did he would have to ride down to Kandy and take the train from there. It was much farther off than Nuwara Eliya. . . .

"Surly brute," said Bennet, carelessly, as the two men walked on in the direction of Madura.

"Yes. I wonder what's upset him now?" said Keane. He had not been unaware of the hostile glances which Matthew during their brief interview had bestowed upon Bennet.

"If I were Mrs. Mansfield I should go away and never come back," said Bennet, striking at a tea-bush and knocking off a slender emerald tip.

"I should miss her though I so seldom see her,"

said Keane. "She is a charming woman, and I like that little girl of hers with the queer green eyes."

Garth was silent. He was beginning to wish that Viola would solve the cruel and complicated little problem by leaving Kellioya and never coming back. In time he would surely be able to forget her, her voice, her rippling laugh, all the gay and sad sweetness of her.

Mrs. Mansfield. . . . He wondered if that could really be her name. Probably it was nothing of the kind, she had no right to any name but that of Hudson, and would be unlikely to adopt that of Hilary's father, whose identity she so obstinately declined to divulge. Perhaps he was some well-known man who had bribed her to keep silence on the point. Garth writhed at the thought.

CHAPTER XIII

VIOLA had been in Colombo for some days. She found Mrs. Monk's bungalow everything that her fancy had pictured. It stood quite close to the sea, well back from the busy Kollupitiya Road, which forms part of the great thoroughfare that goes from Colombo to Mount Lavinia. The railway line ran between her garden and the sandy shore, that was washed ever by the tideless Indian Ocean. The garden was a pleasant shady place, full of flowers, crotons and ferns. Bushes of flaming oleanders, scarlet hibiscus, and golden allamandas blossomed there under the shade of a grove of coconut palms that lifted their graceful fronds to the dazzling blue of the sky. Two or three lettuce-trees of as pale and brilliant a green as the vegetable from which they derive their name, stood at the end of the garden near the road, where a thick hedge of hibiscus showed its scarlet decorative flowers.

Unlike most Colombo bungalows the house was built on two stories, and all the bedrooms were upstairs, which rendered them far cooler and more airy. The walls were of white stucco, and a mass of flaming crimson bougainvillea flung itself over the roof. Deep verandas ran all round the house, and the windows of the ground-floor rooms were immense and reached to the floor. Wooden shutters painted a dark green protected them during the hot hours of the day. There was a certain dampness in the air due to the sea-wind, and the place was far less infested by mosquitoes than most Colombo habitations.

Mrs. Monk was a charming woman of about fifty-seven; she was pale and emaciated from her long residence in the tropics, but she loved Ceylon and was perfectly happy there, and like so many English people contemplated spending her old age in the island. A few visits home had taught her that life in Ceylon was simpler and easier in many ways than life in England. The abundance of servants, the cheaper food, the charm of a winterless climate with no long crusade against cold, darkness and dirt, compensated to a considerable degree for the exile which now after so many years of gradual detachment was really hardly exile at all. Of late years her husband had bought a small tea-estate in the hills, and during the hot weather they always spent several months there.

Viola felt the age-old attraction of the East taking possession of her. The wonderful tropical vegetation, the flowers, often so heavily scented, the strange fruits, that blue sea coming up to the greenest of lands, held a charm to which she readily succumbed. And after the silences of Kellioya she felt once more life stirring about her. The brilliant native crowds that thronged the red roads of Colombo interested her. There were white-clad Sinhalese,

the men wearing their glossy black hair fastened in feminine fashion in a knot at the nape of the neck, and kept back from their forehead by a semicircular comb such as children used to wear, the women dressed in colored skirts and little white jackets of Eton shape. The Tamil women with immense silver earrings and nose-ornaments were more gracefully dressed in scanty fluttering draperies of striking pink or yellow design. There were turbaned Tamils dragging rickshaws and doing most of the active work in house and garden and stables; tall men from the Persian Gulf; warrior-like looking Afghans; Mohammedans or Moormen in white garments with the tarbush on their heads. There were Eurasians too, "burghers" as they are called in Ceylon, half-castes descended from old Dutch or Portuguese families, many of them bearing ancient names of those races. The women were often elaborately dressed in the latest European fashions, and though generally dark-haired and dark-eyed their skins were sometimes hardly less pale than those of the English colony. English people indeed often looked more pallid and delicate than they really were, in contrast to the dark glowing faces around them. Viola felt that she could never grow tired of watching the scene, which held so much of the vivid color, the glamor and mystery of the East. Mystery that seemed to be hidden behind those inscrutable eyes, those unsmiling dark faces But the beauty of the *décor* with all its kaleidoscopic effects enchanted her.

There was a convent not very far from where Mrs. Monk lived, and she obtained permission from the nuns to go there to Mass daily. The Catholic Cathedral was in Mutwal, quite at the other end of Colombo, and there was no church very near her, so she was glad to make use of the nuns' chapel.

Matthew, as he had said, was not in the habit of

coming to Colombo except on those very rare occasions when he had business to transact. He had no friends there, and the only men with whom he was acquainted were members of firms or banks, and a few subordinate government officials. He was known only by name to the colony, and he had justly earned the reputation of being a miserly, misanthropic, morose man who seldom left his own fastness at Kellioya. It was therefore a surprise to most people to find that he possessed such a young, attractive and beautiful sister. She looked almost like a girl, they declared in private to Mrs. Monk, who was enchanted at having the opportunity of exhibiting her lovely *protégée*. Too young really to be the mother of a little girl of two and a half years. . . . Her husband? "Oh, she's separated. A very unfortunate affair . . . they don't like it to be mentioned." Mrs. Monk was ready with a glib explanation for the curiously-minded. She would sometimes add: "She was an orphan and very young, hardly out of the school-room when it happened." But she was in absolute ignorance of the true facts. Viola was obstinately silent and reticent about her past, and no one dared show the slightest curiosity on the subject in her presence.

She came down one morning to find Mrs. Monk sitting in the veranda while a Tambi, or native peddler, was unfastening his huge pack preparatory to a gratuitous exhibition of his wares. Viola took a seat near her to watch the process, with which she was still unfamiliar. The glittering things, the brass and silverware, the silks, embroideries, tablecloths, and sandal-wood boxes with a few probably quite worthless gems, made an extremely attractive display.

"Do you want to buy anything, Viola?" asked Mrs. Monk, picking up a length of flame-colored silk.

"Oh, I want everything," said Viola, laughing, "but I can't spend much." She examined a sandalwood box, quaintly carved.

"I'll give you two rupees for that box," said Mrs. Monk, in a tone of great decision.

The Tambi showed all his teeth in a deprecating smile.

"Two rupees?—Too much asking, lady," he said.

"It isn't worth more, and I won't give you another cent!"

"Too much asking, lady. Three rupees."

"Three rupees! When I can get a better one in the Pettah for one fifty!"

"Pettah not having lovely box like that, lady," remonstrated the Tambi.

Viola could hear him murmuring to himself in dreamy fashion, "Too much asking."

She picked up a little box containing gems of varying hues.

"How much are these moonstones?" she asked.

The Tambi, concluding from her fresh complexion and fashionable attire that she had but lately arrived from England, answered rapidly:

"Two rupees each, lady."

"Nonsense," said Mrs. Monk, "they're not worth one."

"Lady taking box," murmured the Tambi.

"Yes, but I've changed my mind about it. I'll give you one fifty for it—it isn't worth more."

"One fifty!" he exclaimed, in a tone of despair.

"I think I'll get some of that blue silk to make a frock for Hilary," said Viola.

"It's very thin—don't give him more than a rupee a yard for it," advised Mrs. Monk.

"I'll take three yards," said Viola, holding it up. "One rupee a yard."

"Lady, lucky lady. Lady can have," said the Tambi, unexpectedly. He held out a tiny sandal-

wood box into which he dropped a moonstone. "I making lady present—lady, lucky lady." He measured the silk and cut off the length required.

Viola looked questioningly at Mrs. Monk, who whispered, "By all means take the present. They often give something if they think you look lucky, especially if they haven't sold anything that day."

Viola smiled at the man, accepted the box and said, "Thank you very much."

After considerable bargaining Mrs. Monk purchased a small brass tray, very elaborately beaten. "It really is native work," she said, "so many of these things are made in Birmingham and imported."

The Tambi proceeded to fold up his goods and pack them into the immense basket, which, despite its great weight when filled, he carried on his head. When he had gone Mrs. Monk announced that they were invited to tiffin at a bungalow on Slave Island.

"I want you to see it," she said, "there's such a pretty garden going down to the lake. And the flamboyant trees are in flower."

"You know I'm not accustomed to such a whirl of gayety," said Viola, half in remonstrance. Since coming to Colombo her dread of meeting someone she knew and of being recognized, had come back to her with its old violence.

"It's very good for you, my dear," said Mrs. Monk, kindly, "and I'm sure you'll like the Blairs. He's a very promising young Civil servant."

"Still, I'd ever so much rather stay here with you," said Viola.

"And then this evening there'll be polo on Galle Face—I should like you to see that."

Viola smiled. "It's really too bad of you!"

"My dear, you've been boxed up at Kellioya far too long!"

Little Mrs. Blair was about Viola's own age, and had a small boy rather younger than Hilary. Viola could not help contrasting this woman's happy lot with her own. Wilfrid Blair was obviously very much in love with his wife, and they had a charming home. On the stretch of grass that went down to the edge of the lake there stood a group of very fine flamboyant trees, stripped now of all their leaves and with their branches completely covered with scarlet blossoms, pendant drops shaped rather like those of an acacia. They made a wonderful blot of pure and brilliant color against the blue of lake and sky.

Suddenly Mrs. Blair said: "When Garth Bennet was staying with us he insisted upon rowing on the lake every evening. It's lucky we had a boat."

"Surely he lives near you up-country, Mrs. Mansfield?" said Blair. "I remember his saying Madura wasn't very far from Kellioya. He's been trying to persuade us to go up there on a long visit."

"Yes, he's a neighbor of ours," said Viola.

"I've been told he's made his bungalow perfectly lovely," said Mrs. Blair, "it seems he has wonderful taste. What do you think of it, Mrs. Mansfield?"

"I?" Viola colored faintly. "Why, I've never seen it."

"Never seen it?" echoed Mrs. Blair, in astonishment, "but I thought you were neighbors!"

"So we are," answered Viola, "but Madura is some miles from Kellioya, and my brother never entertains at all, so we don't see anything of our neighbors . . . unless it's quite by chance," she added, remembering those brief accidental meetings with Garth down by the river.

"Well, he's written to say that he hopes to come down quite soon and of course he'll stay with us.

You must come and meet him, Mrs. Mansfield," said Blair, kindly.

Viola said nothing. She even felt a little inward indignation that he should choose the present time for a visit to Colombo. She had come here to escape from him, and it was incredible that he should follow her in this way. Matthew would be angry when he heard of it; it would confirm his suspicions that she had come to Colombo on purpose to meet Garth there.

"I knew his wife," said Blair, presently. "A charming creature—he was simply broken-hearted when she died. Sudden thing too. I don't quite understand his spending so much of his time out here, though, separating himself really quite unnecessarily from his son. He's devoted to the boy, and he might just as well have him out."

"Our climate is very good for children," said Viola, "my little girl thrives at Kellioya, and then she escapes all the usual infantile complaints."

"You must bring her to tea one day with our small boy," said Blair.

"Oh, I shall be delighted. She hardly knows any other children. It would be so good for her."

The tiffin, with its inevitable accompaniment of curry and rice, was now at an end. Mrs. Blair led the way into the veranda, and they sat there, drinking coffee, and looking at the charming landscape, the lake with its wooded banks, so brilliantly green with the tropical vegetation, and the scarlet flamboyants in all the pride of their brief blossoming.

CHAPTER XIV

ONE evening a few days later, Viola was walking on Galle Face with Mrs. Monk. They had been watching the polo and listening to the

band, and having left the carriage near the hotel were taking a little exercise in the cool of the evening. Mrs. Monk had hired a bullock-hackery for Hilary and Rebecca. It was a light cart with a cover, and was drawn by an active brown bullock with an immense hump. Many of the Colombo children used this simple means of conveyance driven by a Tamil, whose loud cries of "Tcha! Tcha! M'ck, m'ck, pità, pità!" delighted Hilary, and even amused the grim and silent Rebecca.

The bullock-hackery had driven off, Hilary had waved her little hand in farewell to her mother, who now proceeded to walk slowly along by the side of Mrs. Monk.

The famous promenade was crowded with people, walking, driving, riding. It was near the hour of sunset, and it seemed that all Colombo had emerged from bungalows, offices and shops to enjoy the freshness of the evening air after the great heat of the tropical day.

Before them lay the vast plain of the Indian Ocean, silver as a polished shield and faintly wrinkled with gray as the light breeze touched it. The sun was sinking in a flood of pure gold, and presently the sea too reflected those translucent daffodil and primrose hues. At one end of the long esplanade the great cream-colored buildings of the Colombo Fort reared themselves in massive dusky silhouette; at the other end the Galle Face Hotel was half hidden in a group of shivering cocoanut palms.

A steamer had just left the harbor, and was going rapidly in a southerly direction. Her smoke left a faint purple smudge on the wonderful silver and gold of sky and sea. Her white track cut a luminous pathway and her lights flashed out like jewels. Just as the sun dipped beneath the horizon the phenomenon familiar to people in the tropics was manifested.

The last slender crescent of the sun flashed out for a second, no longer gold or crimson but colored a brilliant green, before it disappeared beneath the smooth waste of waters. In Ceylon this is commonly called the Emerald, and one must watch closely to see that brief flash of pure green light.

A group of Parsees knelt down on the shore and prayed. . . .

"It will soon be getting dark now—we shall have to be turning back," said Mrs. Monk.

Viola walked beside her, a tall graceful distinguished-looking figure, her beauty conspicuous even in that thronging crowd. She was dressed very simply in a white embroidered dress and a large shady white hat. People turned to look at her, and to inquire who she was; a few stopped to speak to Mrs. Monk in the hope of obtaining an introduction. They were just turning homeward when a group of young officers wearing the white uniform of the tropics approached them. Viola stood a little apart; her dread of encountering strangers had grown upon her in Colombo, and she had had a haunting fear ever since her arrival, of meeting Esmé. At Kellioya she never had this fear, but she knew that men from India often came to Ceylon for a few weeks' sport or to enjoy the bracing air of Nuwara Eliya after a season in the Plains, spending a few days in Colombo on their way.

She moved on ahead a little. But before she had gone many steps she found herself face to face with Garth Bennet. It hardly surprised her to see him, knowing that he had been expected to stay with the Blairs.

He approached her, quickly, eagerly.

"Yes—I've come, Mrs. Mansfield. I *had* to come. When can I see you alone?"

He was very pale, and his eyes looked large and bright, as if he had not slept for many nights. His

mouth was hard and resolutely set, and the whole face had a sternness of purpose that she was not accustomed to associate with him.

In the dusk her cold pale face held a curious brooding expression, as if he had awakened her roughly from a dream.

"You cannot see me alone." There was a faint reproof in her voice. She was evidently not inclined to overlook that unfortunate speech of his on the hills of Kellioya.

"Viola . . . I simply must . . ."

"It is impossible." She lifted her dark eyes and looked at him squarely. "You should have stayed at Madura. You shouldn't have followed me here. You drove me away."

He fell back a little. "Oh, you should have waited. I had to get over the shock—the surprise—I know I lost my head at first and said things I oughtn't to have said. You must forgive me. I've had time to think it over, and I've hit on a way out."

"A way out?" she repeated.

"Yes. That's why I must see you alone—explain it to you. You mustn't refuse . . . Viola, beloved." His voice sank to a whisper. "When may I come?"

"If it's so very important you can come in the morning. Will ten o'clock be too early for you? We may be going out later. But I want you to understand one thing quite clearly. I am not going to marry you."

His face fell a little. "Ah, don't say that until you know what I've got to tell you. Viola—it's something that may make all the difference." His face was now almost boyish in its eagerness. "I was afraid I must have offended you the other day when I met you on the estate. And I so wanted to see you again. . . ."

She did not speak, and it seemed to him there was a touch of scorn even in her silence.

"If you only hadn't gone away like that! . . ." he added.

"I was glad to go away. You made me regret that I had ever told you my secret. You taught me just what people would say—just what they would think of me if they knew the truth." She lifted her face now, and in the deepening blue dusk he could see that it was cold, pale, emotionless.

"I will come at ten," he said, and the eager hope faded a little from his face. "We shall be alone, of course?"

"Of course—if you wish it. And afterward perhaps you will go back to Madura?"

"It depends. Blair wants me to stay on a bit, and you know I love Colombo. I've been playing tennis this evening with them at the Garden Club, and we often go on the lake after dinner."

"I am glad you like it so much," she answered. She gave him her hand. "Good-by." She moved quietly toward Mrs. Monk.

Garth vanished before Mrs. Monk had time to recognize him for she said immediately:

"Who was that young man, Viola?"

"Oh, that's the famous Sir Garth Bennet of Madura."

"Sir Garth? Oh, I wish I'd spoken to him. I know him—he came to tiffin one day, and declared I'd given him the best prawn-curry he'd ever eaten! I shall ask the Blairs to bring him to dinner one night."

Mrs. Monk was the soul of hospitality, and always preferred to sit down to tiffin or dinner with a guest or two, to provide her with the harmless gossip she loved. Viola had made this discovery with something like dismay.

"Oh, please don't ask him! At least perhaps

not while I'm here. . . . He's coming to see me tomorrow morning at ten, and after that I hope he'll go back to Madura." There was a kind of passionate entreaty in her voice.

Mrs. Monk was tactful and said no more, perceiving that the subject had proved unexpectedly agitating.

"That girl's a regular bundle of nerves," she thought.

Of course she was aware of the baffling mystery that surrounded her young friend. Once she had hoped to penetrate it, but even in the tedious, otiose hours of a long sea-voyage she had never caught Viola off her guard for a single moment.

They drove along the soft *kabook* road. These red roads of Colombo are a very characteristic and distinctive feature of the place, winding between the avenues of brilliant verdure like warm fiery ribbons. But they offer in dry weather a baleful red dust that permeates shoes and clothing to a highly detrimental degree.

Sumptuous bungalows, each standing in its own compound and shaded by a grove of cocoanut palms, were to be seen on both sides of the road. Here and there too they passed a little group of native dwellings, dark mud-built cabins with thatched roofs and strings of bananas in all stages of ripening depending from the eaves. Little children played in the dust outside, fat naked brown babies with adorable black eyes rolled on the ground together with the cocks and hens and lean, leggy pariah dogs. These little huts were very picturesque in their delicate green setting of shady banana-palms.

A Tamil coolie ran lightly past dragging a rickshaw occupied by a pale-faced European who leaned languidly back. In his easy rapidity and agility and muscular strength the native looked like some bronze statue come to life. He threaded his way

dexterously through the traffic, dragging the light two-wheeled carriage after him.

"It seems so odd that you should hardly know each other when Sir Garth is such a near neighbor," said Mrs. Monk, musingly.

"If you knew Matthew you wouldn't think it odd," said Viola. "He never lets me entertain our neighbors."

"So they have to follow you down to Colombo to see you at all!" laughed Mrs. Monk.

And she thought: "What a pity she isn't free! But of course that young man knows she isn't—everyone knows that. And her being a Catholic makes it all the more hopeless."

They were just turning in at the gates of the bungalow.

"But I hope you will ask him to stay to tiffin to-morrow if you wish to," she added.

"Oh, thank you very much, but I don't expect he'll be able to stay." Viola's voice was still troubled.

For of course there was nothing he could say to her which could ever make her change her mind. And then his coming in this way seemed to put her in a false position in the eyes of those who still believed that she was not free to marry. This thought evoked within her a secret indignation.

She went slowly up to her room. It was at the back of the house and looked on to the sea, which was barely a hundred yards away. Near in she could see the moving light of a fragile catamaran sailing past. The coast was rocky, and here and there a great white wall of surf indicated the presence of some hidden peril. The murmur of the sea, very soft but rhythmic and sustained, mingled with the rustle of the cocoanut palms. From a group of native huts nearby there came the sound of tom-toms whose dull beat seemed to resemble that

of some mighty muffled pulse. Sometimes a voice flung out a scrap of song, monotonous, melancholy, to the night. . . .

What could Garth possibly have to say to her?

He was punctual to the moment on the following morning. Viola had been out to Mass at an early hour, and upon returning had partaken of her early tea with Hilary in the veranda. Then the child accompanied by Rebecca had gone off in the bullock-hackery to the Cinnamon Gardens. Viola had stood at the front door under an archway watching them depart. They had hardly gone when Garth made his appearance in a hired carriage, which he dismissed at the gate. He walked down the garden to where Viola was standing.

The sun was shining on the browns and golds of the crotons. A great allamanda tree in full flower was offering its slender golden trumpets for the feasting of innumerable bees. Mingled with the scent of flowers there was a brackish odor borne on the sea-wind.

"It's heavenly here," pronounced Garth, "and far cooler than Slave Island."

"Don't you get a breeze off the lake?" asked Viola.

"Oh, yes, to a certain extent. But it seems so closed in, in comparison with this."

"Mrs. Monk tells me that she had to wait for years to get this bungalow," said Viola, glancing up at the white walls, decorated with that splendid patch of crimson bougainvillea, flowing across the roof. She paused for a moment. "Shall we sit in the veranda or go down to the shore?"

"Oh, the shore, please, if it isn't too hot for you," he said, eagerly, reflecting that down there on those yellow sands there would be much less chance of interruption. He did not feel in the mood

to-day for Mrs. Monk's gushing hospitality. He wanted to see Viola alone, to find out if there was no way by which they might come together.

Seeing her now after more than a week, he decided that he loved her better than ever before. And she would be sweet to Kenneth . . . she so loved little children. Perhaps in time Kenneth would almost take the place of Hilary in her heart. . . .

They crossed the railway-line which runs from Colombo to Galle. In the distance they could see the promontory of Mount Lavinia thrusting its palm-fringed arm into the sea, forming a little bay whereon the catamarans guided by a single bronze figure rode so lightly.

They sat down side by side on the sand, with the waves washing close to their feet. Before them the Indian Ocean was colored like a clear sapphire under the burning blue of that tropical sky. All along the shore the groves of cocoanut palms made a deep fringe of lustrous green with never a straight stem among them all.

"Do you like Colombo?" he asked. Her silence embarrassed him and forced him to utter the banal question.

"Yes—I've enjoyed my visit, but I shouldn't like to live here—the climate wouldn't do for Hilary at all. Already she's lost some of her color. And the English children in Colombo look so white and thin."

"Do you always think first of Hilary?" he asked.

"Always."

"But if you were to form fresh ties she might not be quite so important," he said.

When she spoke of Hilary in that way, he found it more and more difficult to tell her of his plans for the future.

Garth held a not uncommon theory that no

woman could care very much for her illegitimate child. She must ever regard it as a source of shame, of reproach. And that sense of shame must surely mingle with her love to its hurt. But somehow he felt that he couldn't judge Viola as he would judge another woman. She was different, and she held different ideals and standards. He said abruptly:

"I've been thinking it all over, Viola, ever since that evening when you told me about yourself at Kellioya. Of course I do see that you were most cruelly duped. And I love you—I want you to be my wife. I'm ready to make all the promises your Church requires, but in return I should have to make one condition. . . ."

As he spoke his eyes rested upon her face.

"A condition?"

His words had sent a little thrill of joy into her heart. For Hilary's sake she felt that it would be well for her to marry him. And though Garth's love had never touched the deeper places of her heart she knew that this marriage would give her a restored happiness, a peace of mind such as perhaps she had never known. And she felt too that his love for her must be very true, very deep, to triumph in this way over the tremendous obstacle that had at first threatened to separate them.

And then Garth spoke, in slow deliberate tones, shattering the very fabric of her dream.

"My condition is that you'd have to give up Hilary. I mean I couldn't have her to live with us. It wouldn't be fair to Kenneth, and then it would lead to too many questions. I should like to keep your story a secret, just as you've always kept it. The presence of a child would stimulate curiosity. . . ."

Viola listened, and as she listened all the bright picture of that suggested home at Madura shivered and vanished, this time, as she clearly saw, forever.

"You're asking me to give up Hilary?" she said.

"Yes. I'm sure you'll see it's the only thing to be done."

She was no longer quite so pale; there were little pink patches in her cheeks, and her eyes held a light that spelt danger. She was astonished as well as indignant that he should have considered her capable of so lightly renouncing her child.

"To give her up for *you*?" she said.

Her tone was cutting. Garth winced.

"But I'd give up everything in the world for you," he said, gently. "Everything and everyone. . . ."

"Not your son," said Viola, breathing hard.

"Well, you may be right. Perhaps not my son." He acknowledged this reluctantly. "But you know I've wondered—ever since you told me about her—that you should have cared to have her with you all this time. Most women in your position would have hidden her out of sight from the first. People need never have known then that you'd got a child at all."

"Hilary is as dear and precious to me as your son is to you. And I can't believe that any woman could be such a monster as you suggest—to abandon a child, a little girl, she had brought into the world!"

She sprang up. Garth rose too. He put his hand on her thin sleeve trying to detain her. "Oh, don't go yet, Viola! Let's talk it over temperately. You must see how impossible it would be for my wife to keep her own illegitimate child with her. I must think of Kenneth too—of any children that might afterward be born . . ."

She stood there facing him, against that blue background of sea and sky;—she was framed in blue, he thought, like some pale Della Robbia Madonna.

"Do you suppose," she said in a low angry tone,

"that I made those tremendous sacrifices for Hilary three years ago—when I might have married her father—only to abandon her now while she's still such a baby and needs me so much? You can know me very little if you think I'm capable of such a thing as that! Don't speak of it again—don't try to see me again! I'm sorry that I ever told you . . . anything . . . anything at all." There was a trembling in her voice that seemed to indicate she was not far from tears.

"Well, you'll run no risk of seeing me for the present," said Garth; "I had a cable last night which necessitates my going home in a few days."

"I hope it wasn't any bad news?" she said, relenting.

"No—not in the sense you mean. But a cousin of mine has died—a distant cousin whom I didn't know at all well, and he's left me a little money—I can't think why—and I must run home to see about it."

"I am glad," she said, with recovered serenity, "that it was no one you cared for very much."

"No—poor old Esmé—we were at school together but we never got on. He's always been a bit of a rotter. It'll be a heavy blow, though, for his poor old father, for he was an only son."

Viola's face had suddenly grown stone-like. "Esmé?" she repeated.

"Yes, Esmé Craye, old Lord Bethnell's son. He died quite suddenly while on leave from India. He had had a good many attacks of malaria and I suppose they'd weakened his heart. Why, what's the matter, Mrs. Mansfield? Are you feeling faint?" He sprang toward her, and gripped her by the arm. She swayed and almost fell. The whole bright blue world was spinning about her in glittering gyrations of crystal light that blinded and dazzled her. One fact stood out amid all her confusion. Esmé was

dead. The man who had wronged her so deeply, the man she had loved and trusted. Hilary's father whom now she would never see on earth. . . .

Her face was livid; Garth, thinking she was going to faint, seized her in his strong arms. Almost carrying her he climbed the steps that enabled people to scale the iron barriers that divided the railway-line from the shore.

In the garden he led her to a seat beneath some spreading banana-palms. "Shall I fetch you something? Would you like anything?" he asked.

He was conscious then of something sinister in this sudden attack of hers. What did it mean? Had she ever known Esmé?

"No—no—I shall be all right in a moment."

She leaned forward a little and hid her face in her hands. She was aware perhaps of his close puzzled scrutiny.

Presently a sound of wheels was heard. It was the hackery, returning with Hilary and Rebecca. The child, catching sight of her mother under the trees, rushed toward her with a little shout of joy. Viola with an effort took her in her arms. The sense of dizziness, of faintness, had passed. But the words still echoed dully, rhythmically, in her brain like the beats of a hammer. "Esmé is dead, Esmé is dead . . ." Twenty-seven—it was young to die, young to leave the beautiful bright world he had so loved. . . . She had almost forgotten the presence of Garth Bennet.

With folded arms he stood watching her. And as he watched, his attention was suddenly arrested by the charming upturned face of little Hilary. Her eyes . . . yes, he knew now where he had seen those eyes before. Esmé had had them; old Lady Bethnell had them. So that was the reason of Viola's faintness and emotion. He had strongly suspected that something had lain behind it. A dull

flush reddened his cheeks. He almost hated Hilary then. But for her he would have married this woman whom he loved with such strange passion. Hilary made it more than ever impossible. . . .

"So it was Esmé," he said, in a hard voice. "I always knew he was a rotter but I never knew he was such a scoundrel as that!"

Viola did not answer, but it seemed to him that she clasped little Hilary more closely to her, smoothing back the fair golden curls with her hand.

He wondered he had never before noticed the extraordinary resemblance the child bore to Esmé Craye.

"Was it Esmé?" he repeated. His voice held an ugly little sound.

Viola looked at him with her clear frank gaze.

"Yes," she said, "it was Esmé. This will show you perhaps how impossible it is for me to marry you. I will only ask you one thing—to respect my secret as far as you are able."

She gave him her hand, and then went toward the house, leading Hilary. There was something final about the manner of her going, almost as if she had shut a door in his face. But she was right. Marriage between them was out of the question. This new knowledge had raised the dividing barrier a little higher.

Esmé and Viola. . . .

His love, a tortured, maimed thing, writhed at the insupportable thought. He wondered that she was ever able to bear to look at her baby's face with its tell-tale likeness to Esmé Craye. . . .

CHAPTER XV

VIOLA hurried upstairs with Hilary. One thing only filled her mind, and that was the news of Esmé's death. In a sense it was a relief to her, but she could still feel sorrow at the thought

of his mother's grief. The child of so many and such high hopes, he had wasted his life, proving from every point of view faithless and untrustworthy. He had never married, and she wondered now if he had ever made any efforts to discover her whereabouts and find the child of whose birth he could never have had any precise tidings.

Perhaps at any other moment she might have felt regret at Garth's departure, which now more than ever must surely prove final. It had been a rapid destruction of a flattering dream wherein she had seen her good name restored, her place in the world established on safe and pleasant lines, her emancipation secured from the narrow and tyrannical rule of her brother.

Her tears flowed now, and she strained Hilary to her heart, assuring herself that never, never could she have entertained the thought of separating herself from her child. Her one means of reparation lay through Hilary. It would never have been possible for her to thrust Hilary out of sight as Garth had suggested, like something of which she was ashamed.

Hilary put up her little chubby hand and said, "Don't kwy, mummy," in a distressed tone. Children are always astonished to see their elders in tears, which are generally associated in their minds with some form of naughtiness from which they invariably imagine grown-ups to be happily exempt.

It was thus that Rebecca found them when she returned from the kitchen regions with some milk for Hilary.

"Sir Garth has gone, ma'am?" she inquired.

Gossip had reached her ears at Kellioya, and she had been aware of his visit that morning. It had suggested possibilities of change, nevertheless she had not been without anxiety for the future, especially where Hilary was concerned. When a woman married again she was apt to neglect the child of a

former marriage. Rebecca loved Hilary; she was jealous for her. It was for this reason that she had secretly looked askance upon Sir Garth's courtship.

"Yes," said Viola. She lifted her face. Even those tempestuous tears could not mar its young pensive loveliness. "He—he isn't coming back," she added, with a sudden longing to confide the truth in someone. She seemed to have shed some of her years, and was speaking to Rebecca as if she were still her nurse who had a right to exact confessions from her.

"I'm very glad indeed to hear that, ma'am," said Rebecca.

Viola longed to ask her why she was glad. She thought the faithful creature, who never grumbled or complained, would have welcomed the thought of perhaps leaving Kellioya and having a comfortable and permanent home in England. Servants, Viola reflected, often recognized the existence of a love-affair before those chiefly concerned had envisaged their own condition. It was only astonishing that she should have watched and then disapproved.

"He wasn't ever one to take to Baby," pursued Rebecca. "You might have had to choose between them, ma'am."

Viola looked at her, slightly bewildered at her perspicacity, so much keener apparently than her own.

"Well, if you want to know, Rebecca dear," said Viola, impulsively, "I *have* chosen."

She strained Hilary to her, kissing the little face, the fair crisp shining hair. When she looked up she added, smiling:

"When one's a mother there isn't really any choice!"

"That's what I should always have thought, ma'am," said Rebecca, relieved.

"Only, it would have been nice to have one's own home again, and feel perfectly settled," said Viola, with a sigh. But a home where there was no Hilary—the prospect was unimaginable! It hurt her to think that Garth should have believed her capable of deserting her own child. Across his surface sympathy she saw plainly that fundamentally he hadn't either known or understood her at all.

Rebecca was silent. She had a low opinion of men, though what this was based upon it was impossible to conjecture. She was convinced, however, that before matrimony they were wont to make specious promises which they never had any intention of fulfilling. Not but what she'd liked the look of Sir Garth, and had considered him in many ways a suitable match for her lady. He was a million times better than that other one with the green eyes and the mocking smile. If Viola had been a young girl, with no Hilary to consider, Sir Garth would have done very well indeed. But any change that even remotely jeopardized Hilary's position in the cosmos, was certainly not to be encouraged. It was thus that Rebecca secretly envisaged a situation which for some time past had perturbed her mind.

Viola had a curious longing to return precipitately to Kellioya. With all its limitations and disadvantages it was the one place where she had found peace. Her principal motive for this visit to Colombo had been completely frustrated by Garth's appearance upon the scene. And then to crown all, as if by some ironic device of Fate's, it was he who had brought her the news of Esmé's death, wresting her secret from her in that moment of sudden emotion.

Viola was shaken by the events of the morning. Until that final interview she had made up her mind

to marry Garth Bennet should he renew his offer to make her his wife. He was a man whom she could trust and who, she felt, would always love her. On her side she liked him very much, and was certain that she could soon learn to love him. Marriage would have meant escape from Kellioya, and perhaps this was one of its principal attractions for Viola, who had suffered considerably under her brother's cruel and suspicious bearing toward her. And in a sense Esmé's death gave her a feeling of freedom. She could go through the world now without that perpetual fear of meeting him suddenly face to face, like a ghost from the past.

But now the chapter was closed, and Viola began to feel that soon she would be able to look back upon the episode without substantial regret. She had never regretted her former sacrifice for Hilary and she did not intend to regret this one. She was grateful to Garth because he had forced her to realize the measure—if such a thing were measurable—of her love for Hilary. Not for all the love and wealth and position in the world would she relinquish her child to strangers. Her first duty, her only duty, was to train her to be a good Catholic, to surround her with all the love and care and happiness that had been lacking to her own childhood. Even if she had been a less passionately maternal woman she felt that she must have come to the same decision, because a mother's life was so closely bound up in that of her child, that a rupture must mean the cruellest anguish to both.

"I've ruined my own life, but I won't ruin Hilary's," she thought.

And then her heart sank, for had not little Hilary's life been in some sense always ruined from the very moment of her birth? She was illegitimate, and Garth had shown Viola something of the world's pitiless attitude toward such nameless chil-

dren. Never before had it been so forcibly brought home to her, as when this man had invited her to marry him, stipulating only that Hilary should have no further part in her mother's life. He had even assured her that most women would in her place have always kept the child rigorously out of sight.

What would Hilary's future be? What would she say when she knew? Would she experience that sudden revulsion of feeling toward her mother—that recoil which Viola had felt rather than seen in Garth Bennet when he had first learned the truth?

"But if she loves me she'll forgive me," she said to herself. "And if she doesn't love me it'll only make her hate me a little more. . . ."

But then of course Hilary would love her! And need she ever know? Oh, she would keep it from her as long as she could—until it became urgently necessary to speak. There were so few to reveal the secret. And if she continued to live in the seclusion of Kellioya, surely it would be possible to keep the ugly little truth from Hilary's knowledge, perhaps for many years to come.

She felt that Esmé's death had made Hilary seem more than ever entirely hers.

Garth Bennet returned to the Blairs' bungalow in sobered mood. His host and hostess could see that things were going amiss with him, though they forbore to question him. But he had been at Eton with Mr. Blair, and when the two men were sitting in the veranda that evening, drinking coffee and smoking, Garth said suddenly:

"I don't mind telling you that I've been bowled middle stump by Mrs. Mansfield. I came down here to ask her to be my wife. But it's all off, and I shall go back to Madura to-morrow."

"Awkward thing for you living so close to her, though," remarked Blair, who admired Mrs. Mans-

field immensely but felt that such a mysterious creature, of whom no one knew very much, was scarcely a suitable person to succeed the late Lady Bennet.

"Oh, I need never see her unless I choose," Garth replied, gloomily. "Her brother's an old misanthrope and something of a miser—a detestable man. She has a lively time of it there, I can tell you, and he practically insults every man who goes to the bungalow. Even Keane, who has known him for years, doesn't often venture there."

"She's not a widow, is she?" inquired Blair.

"Yes . . . no . . . I'm really not sure." Garth stammered as he uttered the words. Would Viola call herself a widow now that Esmé was dead?

"Some queer story behind it all?" suggested Blair.

"Oh, I don't know about that. In any case she was in no way to blame—I'd stake my life on that! In fact she's rather a saint, and a very pious Catholic into the bargain. She was never at all in love with me," he went on, glad to unburden something of his story to a trustworthy listener. "She must have been badly hurt once, and perhaps she'll never fall in love again. And then she's devoted to her little girl."

"Hilary would have made a nice companion for Kenneth," observed Blair.

Garth was silent. He was thinking of the immense sacrifices Viola had made for Hilary. To him they were unnecessary and even quixotic, and the whole episode had taught him how inadequate the Catholic Church was to cope with complicated modern problems. Viola had preferred to brand Hilary with the stigma of illegitimacy rather than bring her up in the Protestant faith. Never was such a clinging to the shadow, such a rejecting of the substance! And she had been simply adamant on the point—this girl who then had scarcely

counted nineteen years. . . . The shadow must then possess a tremendous significance and importance for her. It was something for which she would conceivably have died, as long ago men and women and little children had died in the arenas of Rome. And then irrelevantly there came before his mind the scene in the little chapel near the river at Kellioya. He saw Viola kneeling there, then rising and going forward to the altar rails to receive the Bread of Life. Her faith to her was no shadow, it was the one Thing needful. And she had lived up to it, to the point of crucifying herself and her child. . . .

It was an indication at any rate of the enormous hold the Catholic Church had over her devotees. But for this, Viola might at this moment have been Esmé Craye's widow, and her child the heiress to those millions which Lord Bethnell was commonly supposed to possess.

"There's a good deal of mystery about her and her first husband, you know," said Blair, after a few minutes' pause. "So perhaps it's as well for you. We'd all like to know much more about her than we do. Of course she is beautiful and charming, and Mrs. Monk for one feels positive there's nothing really queer behind it all. You know nothing, I suppose, Garth?"

Garth set his lips. "Nothing at all," he said. At least her secret was safe with him.

It was a relief to Viola when she heard from Mrs. Monk that Garth had returned to Madura. Mrs. Blair had written to say that his visit had come to an abrupt conclusion. There was therefore no danger of a chance encounter, and Viola resolved to stay a little longer in Colombo, as Mrs. Monk still wished for her companionship. In August she was expecting a party of friends to stay with her

for the Race Week with its ceaseless round of balls and gayeties, when every room in Colombo is occupied by pleasure-seekers from all parts of the island.

One afternoon she took Viola to see an old friend of hers, a certain Lady Robinson, the widow of a Colonial knight, who had also spent the greater part of her life in Ceylon, and preferred it to anything the West could offer. She had invited all the little party, Hilary being especially included.

Lady Robinson lived in the Cinnamon Gardens. Viola was by now fairly familiar with the lovely and at that time wild tract of land that lay to the east of Colombo, dotted with bungalows possessing the most delicious gardens imaginable. Here, away from the sea-breezes, the delicate fronds of maiden-hair fern grew luxuriantly in the borders, and beds of eucharis lilies showed their pale fragile blooms. But the park-like land that surrounded those dwellings was in itself like a fertile garden, whole tracts being covered by the dark-leaved, starry-flowered cinnamon shrubs. Here in old days of the Dutch and Portuguese settlers endless fierce contests had been fought between the European invaders and the forces of the native kings for the possession of the valuable, coveted cinnamon. The bright lily that is cherished in English hot-houses as the *Gloriosa Superba* was there to be seen twining its slim stalks amid the cinnamon and opening its gold and scarlet throats to the sun. Banyan trees whose branches descended to the ground and formed fresh roots there, the bread-fruit tree with its magnificent leaves and massive fruits, the cashew-nut and camphor tree, and the Temple-trees with their flowers of waxen whiteness and heavy cloying voluptuous perfume, were mingled there with palms of every description, the cocoanut, date and talipot and the broad emerald leaves of the banana. People rode, or walked or played golf there in the cool of the

evening. If you went far enough you came to a quiet little river set in a plain where buffaloes with immense horns could be seen feeding tranquilly. The banks of the stream were fringed with palms, and at sunset it caught something of those resplendent hues and became a fiery scarlet thread cutting across the quiet green landscape.

Lady Robinson's bungalow was built on one story, with walls of white stucco and a red roof across which a torrent of the inevitable bougainvillea trailed its vivid blossoms. To the right of the house there was a hard tennis court made of gravel and beaten and rolled till its surface was almost as smooth as a billiard table. As Mrs. Monk drove up with Viola and Hilary, they could see four active white-clad figures engaged in a game, while their hostess, a tall woman with snow-white hair and coal-black eyes, watched them from the shade of the veranda.

Lady Robinson was anxious to meet Viola, of whom she had heard a good deal from the Blairs and Sir Garth. She had suspected the latter of using exaggerated language where Viola was concerned, but now that she had seen her for herself, she could not but admit that the girl was unusually lovely.

She made Hilary sit beside her. Tea was brought out immediately and they had nearly finished it when the four players abandoned their game and strolled toward them, eagerly discussing its incidents. Viola was now able to recognize that two of them were Mr. and Mrs. Blair.

Lady Robinson proceeded to introduce her guests to each other. "Mrs. Mansfield—I think you know Mrs. Blair? Let me introduce Mrs. Gorston and Captain Drew."

Mrs. Gorston shook hands with Viola, and then

sinking into a capacious chair proceeded to fan herself with considerable vigor.

"So you've lost Sir Garth," Lady Robinson said, pleasantly, to Mr. Blair; "I hoped he would stay with you till after the Races. But perhaps he will come back then?"

"No, he's not coming back," said Blair, taking a cup of tea from her hands. "At least only for one night. He has to go home. While he was here he heard of the sudden death of his cousin, Esmé Craye, and he inherits something, I forget what. At any rate he has to go home about it."

"Esmé Craye? Oh, I met him at Bangalore," said Mrs. Gorston, who had traveled extensively in India and always claimed acquaintance with anyone who chanced to be mentioned. "I was very fond of him—he was such a good dancer and rode to perfection. All the girls were in love with him, but he was supposed to be suffering from an unfortunate love-affair. Lord Bethnell wouldn't hear of his marrying the girl he cared for, although I believe there was nothing at all against her, except that she was a Catholic." She looked at Viola as she spoke, but the pale face displayed no emotion. "I wonder what he died of?"

"Heart," said Blair, laconically.

"And not thirty years old! How very sad . . ." said Mrs. Gorston. "I used to think he was one of the handsomest men I'd ever seen. But there was something odd about him too. You felt that you never really knew him."

"I remember him," said Captain Drew, suddenly, "tall chap with queer green eyes and fair hair that waved like a girl's. But odd?—I should think he was! He was a fine polo-player, but no one really liked him."

Viola sat very still. More than ever, now that he was dead, could he count upon her silence. Only

Garth had wrested her secret from her in that first moment of emotion when he had so roughly conveyed to her the news of Esmé's death, and Garth for love of her would surely never speak.

Esmé's face, pale and agitated as she had last seen it, seemed to be swimming before her now in a sea of mist, like a drowning man's. . . .

No one should guess, from any sign that she might give, that she was the Catholic girl whom Esmé had loved, that this child who sat near her was the fruit of that love. . . .

"You are looking very pale, Mrs. Mansfield," said Lady Robinson, kindly; "I hope you aren't feeling the heat too much? Let me give you another cup of tea." She took Viola's cup and poured some strong aromatic tea into it. Viola drank the stimulant eagerly.

She could hardly bear to look at Hilary then. The child displayed that marked and striking resemblance to her father which had always been one of Viola's peculiar torments. How far would she resemble him in character? Would she be possessed by that fierce egoism—that fantastic charm—that smiling deceit? She hoped and prayed not. Hilary would know certain spiritual truths of which Esmé had ever remained in ignorance. But Viola knew nevertheless that Hilary's true character would never be revealed till the day of reckoning came. Then surely it would be seen in all its naked truth. Hilary under that fiery test would reveal her true colors. Viola shivered, despite the clammy heat of the Colombo evening.

She was incapable of sorrow now when she thought of Esmé. Could it be that she had grown hard? But if so it was life that had made her hard, and all the suffering and shame through which she had passed as through avenues of fire. And it was Esmé who had brought that suffering and

shame into her life. It would always be there, like a black shadow from which she could never escape. Enveloping herself and Hilary as with a cloud. . . .

"Perhaps he will mention this girl in his will," said Mrs. Gorston, who was much addicted to the reading of romances. "That would be thrilling, wouldn't it?"

"Very thrilling and most unlikely, my dear," said Lady Robinson, placidly. "Now you must all come and see my garden," she added.

She rose and led the way. Viola was thankful to escape from the nightmare little discussion. She had feared the sharp scrutiny of Mrs. Gorston, who knew so much of the truth. How had she learned it? Esmé would surely have been the last person to divulge anything of it.

"She's very pretty, isn't she?" Mrs. Gorston murmured confidentially to Captain Drew as, after a tour of the garden, they returned to the tennis court to resume their game. "She has a terrible old brother at Kellioya, I believe, who won't let her see a soul and is rude to anyone who goes there. I suppose there is something odd about her story, and he's afraid of someone finding out what it is."

"Blair tells me it's all over between her and Garth," said Captain Drew; "he seems to have gone back to Madura quite disconsolate."

"Perhaps she isn't free. That's what Lady Robinson thinks," said Mrs. Gorston.

CHAPTER XVI

IT WAS about a week later, and Viola was forming plans to return to Kellioya. She was alone one evening, Mrs. Monk having been invited to dine at Queen's House with the Governor and his wife. She had wished she could take Viola, who was, how-

ever, secretly, immensely relieved that this was out of the question. Mrs. Monk went off in high spirits, wearing a perfectly new dress of filmy black chiffon which had just arrived from Paris, and some fine diamonds.

"Well, good-night, my dear," she said, kissing Viola. "Perhaps you'll take the opportunity of going to bed early."

Viola was sitting alone in the drawing-room after dinner. The three big windows opened upon the veranda, from which a step took one into the garden. There was a cloying fragrance of jessamine and Temple flowers that seemed to make the heavy air unusually trying. The night was still and very hot.

Outside, the moonlight shone on the grove of palms so that their black fronds shone like polished argent. There was a broad golden path of light across the sea, which to-night was so smooth and calm that its murmur was scarcely apparent.

Suddenly she heard a slight stir in the veranda, and looking up quickly she saw a man's figure standing in the archway of the window nearest to her. She could not see his face, but from his height she immediately recognized Garth Bennet.

"I am sure Mrs. Monk will forgive my calling at such an unearthly hour," he said, "but I am leaving quite early in the morning. I only arrived in Colombo to-night."

"Mrs. Monk is dining at Queen's House," she answered.

"Then you're alone?"

"Yes, I'm alone. Won't you sit down?"

"Let's sit in the veranda—it's cooler," he suggested.

She rose and went out; they found some chairs, and for a little while sat there without speaking.

The sky was all illuminated with moonlight, and

the shadows of the garden were colored like ebony. The palms were heavily etched in black and silver. From a neighboring native quarter they could hear the melancholy beat of the tom-toms, the monotonous singing of the coolies. And while they listened, it seemed to them both that they were remote and apart from the rest of the world.

"Is there no hope for me, Viola?" he said at last, abruptly.

"None at all. I'm sorry that you came to-night. It would have been better to go away without seeing me again."

"And that's just what I couldn't do," he answered. "I want you to give me a little hope. I'm sure you could provide for Hilary, and of course I should let you go and see her whenever you wanted to. She should have every possible advantage in the way of education. She is so very young now, that I think she would soon forget you and settle down." His voice was sad. It seemed to him that if Viola refused to marry him the future could hold no possible happiness for him.

"I can only say what I said before. I wouldn't part from Hilary for all the world."

His heart sank. It was less possible now than ever, to introduce Hilary at Stonewood. Esmé's child—and with that striking resemblance to her father, too, which he felt he must have been blind never to have perceived before! People might notice it. He had always disliked Esmé; now, looking at Viola, he felt that he could hardly refrain from actively hating him. He had taken Viola's life into his hands, and broken and wrecked it. When he had sought to make amends she must already have known to the full his faithlessness, his falseness. Still, not one woman in a thousand would have acted as she had done. Most women would have eagerly welcomed the opportunity of legalizing the position

of their own child before it was too late. Viola was the exception, and he did not believe she had even now begun to regret the sacrifice she had made.

"You've sacrificed yourself enough for Hilary," he said, at last. "It's time that you thought of yourself a little. The life out here will kill you, Viola. People are making up all sorts of stories about you—they have scented a mystery—they want to know why you never speak of your past life nor of your—husband. . . . Even Blair said something to me. If you were my wife I'd take you away from all that. You'd be happy at Stonewood—my mother and sister would be devoted to you. . . . And I should try to make up to you for all that you have suffered."

"I can never be your wife," she said. "I shall never abandon Hilary. She's my own child, and she comes first. I don't mind what people say and conjecture a bit. When I go back to Kellioya they'll soon forget me. Don't please try to see me again." There was a subdued, controlled passion in her tone.

Garth rose and paced the veranda restlessly. When he came back to where she was sitting he stopped in front of her. "You must be made of iron," he said. "And you seem to think I'm making an extraordinary condition. Didn't it ever strike you that it would be better to hide Hilary? Even at first, I mean—soon after she was born?"

She looked at him with her cold soft scrutiny.

"No. I wanted her too much," she said, simply. "It must be terrible for a child to feel it isn't wanted."

And she thought of the first moment when Rebecca had put Hilary into her arms. She had only been afraid then lest something should happen to the too fragile little life, so intimately bound up with her own. . . .

"Viola, I am a rich man. I could make very large settlements upon you without injuring Ken-

neth in the least. I could settle Madura on you." He came a step nearer.

"It isn't a question of money at all," said Viola. "And I have quite enough for myself and Hilary. We shall never be at all rich, but at least we shan't starve."

Garth looked at his watch. The homeward-bound steamer was leaving early, and he still had a good deal to do. He was staying at the hotel and had not even told the Blairs of his arrival. What spare time he had in Colombo he had always resolved should be given to Viola. He would make one more effort to win her. He would break down that indifference of hers. He would plead as never before. And it had all been utterly useless. . . .

"I am going now, Viola. If you should ever change your mind will you write to me?"

"I shall never change my mind," she said, quietly, "and you'd better try to forget me. I'm not—I could never be—the right woman for you. There'd always be something which would make you a little ashamed when you thought of me. You'd be afraid of people finding out—something. It wouldn't be easy for either of us. Even if there were no Hilary, you would be ashamed of me sometimes when you thought of the secret we were both hiding." She rose to her feet. "Good-by," she said, "I hope you'll have a nice voyage. Perhaps you won't return to Madura just yet?" There was something of entreaty in her voice, as if she were imploring him not to come back while he still loved her.

Garth took her hand and kissed it and then without a word went down the steps into the garden. She watched him as he threaded his way through the narrow sandy paths between the clumps of croton and oleander. Soon he was lost to sight in the shadows. There was no pain for her in this parting. The very slight feeling she had had for him was

dead. Even to the last he had so cruelly believed in his own power to separate her from Hilary.

She was still sitting there, deep in thought, when she heard carriage wheels approaching. A few minutes later Mrs. Monk came out into the veranda. She was astonished to find Viola still there, at that comparatively late hour.

"Oh, my dear, I hope you didn't sit up for me? I thought you would have been in bed long ago."

"No, I didn't want to go to bed," said Viola, looking up. "It was so very hot. I hope you had a nice evening?"

"Delightful!" said Mrs. Monk, "there were some charming people from London—he is very literary, quite a well-known man, and with such a pretty, artistic-looking wife. They were most interesting—one so seldom hears that kind of talk in Colombo! It made me almost long to live in London again." She sighed.

"Well, why don't you?" inquired Viola.

Mrs. Monk shook her head. "I should feel utterly out of it now," she said; "you know, I came here as a girl nearly forty years ago. I was married the day after my arrival. And I've only been home three times. All my people are dead except a brother I hardly know. Ceylon is really our home and we shouldn't be happy anywhere else. Now tell me what you've been doing with yourself all the evening?"

"I had a visitor," said Viola.

"A visitor?"

"Yes. Garth Bennet came to say good-by to me. He leaves for England to-morrow to settle things in connection with his cousin's estate."

"When did he come down?" inquired Mrs. Monk, who was a little puzzled by the situation thus disclosed.

"Only to-night. And the steamer leaves early.

He hoped you wouldn't mind his calling at such an unconventional hour."

"On the contrary, I'm delighted you should have had company while I was out. I hated leaving you alone all the evening. But, you know, we regard invitations to Queen's House almost as royal commands!"

Viola rose languidly. "Garth tells me people are talking about me here," she said, with an effort; "they don't seem to be satisfied with what they know of my story. And I don't want—I can't . . . it's impossible for me to say any more than I've always said."

"My dear, there is no earthly reason why you should satisfy the curiosity of the Colombo gossips!" said Mrs. Monk, very kindly indeed.

"But I think, on the whole, I'd better go back to Kellioya," said Viola. "Of course I've loved being here—it's been the most delicious change. It was very dear of you to have me."

"Oh, but I don't want you to go away at all. I've loved having you. And I've been hoping perhaps some day that you and Garth Bennet—"

Viola stood there in the golden lamplight, her cheeks flushed, her eyes shining. "No—I shall never marry him," she said, with decision. "Tonight he came to ask me again. But this must be a secret—please don't tell anyone. I think I've made him understand now that he must never think of it again."

"I was afraid you were not free," said Mrs. Monk, "and you Catholics are so strict, are you not?"

Viola went up to her impulsively and put her arms round her neck.

"But that is just the hard part of it—I *am* free," she said. "I'm telling you, because you've always

been so kind to me. But don't satisfy the Colombo gossips—I'd rather no one else knew."

"Then why won't you marry Garth Bennet? He seems perfectly devoted to you. Everyone has been talking about it. And his friends thought he would never get over the shock of losing his first wife."

Viola shook her head.

"I'm not the right wife for him," she said. "I think he sees it now. I was sorry he came here to-night."

She kissed Mrs. Monk and trailed slowly out of the room. A little breeze had sprung up, stirring the great black fronds of the palms and emphasizing the murmur of the sea just beyond the garden.

"Poor little girl," thought Mrs. Monk, compassionately.

CHAPTER XVII

THREE days later the little party returned to Kellioya, arriving at the close of a golden evening. The recent rains had washed the world to a wonderful fresh greenness. Even the rolling patanas showed a gleam of emerald on their brown burnt slopes. A great hedge of scarlet geranium was in blossom, and Viola thought she had never seen such flowers, they looked as if they had been fashioned of glowing red velvet scented with a perfume at once sharp and sweet. The air was filled with the delicious almond fragrance of the cinchona. The roses and honeysuckle climbing up the roof of the bungalow were in full bloom, mingling with the deep mauve bells of the thunbergia. Suddenly Viola felt glad to be back. It was like coming home, and the golden evening light seemed to smile a welcome upon her. And she was safe here, safe from prying eyes, from inquisitive lips, safe from chance en-

counters. Oh, in time surely she would learn to be happy and contented at Kellioya, and to bear the limitations of the life it offered. She would do her best to please Matthew. She felt that she wanted to live and to die here in these beautiful solitudes, with Hilary.

"Matthew!"

He was sitting in the veranda, and hearing Viola's voice he rose and stood at the top of the steps, a gigantic rough-hewn figure of a man.

"Hullo, Viola! So you have got tired of Colombo? You're back sooner than I expected."

He gave her his hand. They did not kiss each other, but she felt his attitude was unexpectedly friendly.

He had in truth missed Viola more than he would have cared to own.

"Glad to see you back," he continued. "Have some tea?"

"Yes, thank you—tea is just what I want. But isn't it rather late?"

The old Appu and some of the other servants had now appeared, to greet Viola on her return. Smilingly they made profound salaams. Tea was then ordered, and as Viola sat there drinking it, with Hilary close beside her, she said suddenly:

"Matthew—I'm *glad* to be back. I don't think I shall ever want to go away again." She gazed at the quiet garden and a very soft contented look came into her face.

"Oh, some day I hope you'll have a home of your own. And then perhaps Hilary will stay here and keep her old uncle company!"

His words startled Viola. So he knew. . . . Had Garth spoken to him, and divulged the terms on which he was prepared to marry his sister? Was it possible that the two men had met during her absence, and discussed ways and means? Was this

new friendliness on the part of Matthew merely symptomatic of his attitude toward the proposed marriage? Instinctively she stretched out her hand and drew little Hilary closer to her. Was Matthew also in league with the rest of the world to try to deprive her of her child? His hearty almost affectionate manner had completely deceived her. She had even believed that he was evincing pleasure at her return! Perhaps he was counting confidentially upon her making this brilliant marriage to wipe out the inglorious past and rehabilitate herself in the eyes of the world. . . . What hurt her most was his easy acceptance of her willingness to part with Hilary.

And he was ready to pave the way by signifying his readiness to keep Hilary with him. He had no love for the child, and often he had recommended Viola to adopt stern measures to repress her fits of naughtiness.

"What do you mean, Matthew?" she said, at last.

"Oh, don't pretend ignorance," he said, still good-naturedly. "I had a talk with Keane after you'd gone, and he was anxious I should have an interview with Bennet, he didn't say why, and I really thought he wanted to discuss that bit of land there's always been a dispute about. However, I consented to see him, and then he told me he was going to Colombo to ask you to be his wife. He knew about Hilary, and he said he didn't see his way to having the child in his house, and I agreed to keep her here if the marriage took place. So I knew that he went to Colombo to propose to you. I knew the conditions on which he was prepared to marry you—the very handsome settlements he was willing to make. I'm not a fool, Viola, nor are you. You must see what an excellent marriage this would be for you—quite beyond all your deserts. It would atone for the criminal folly you've shown in the

past. And Hilary is much less likely to be ruined with indulgence if I have the bringing up of her." He smiled grimly.

"Matthew," said Viola, "you can't really believe that I'd give up Hilary for anyone in the world?" She leaned back in her chair in a kind of drooping attitude, as if strength had gone out of her.

"I should have thought you would have been only too thankful to hand her over to me, and put the past out of sight once and for all. Hilary will have a good home here, and I shall take jolly good care not to spoil her. Bennet will take you to England for the present and put a manager on Madura. I must congratulate you on your success, Viola."

"You needn't congratulate me. I'm not going to marry Garth Bennet. I tell you I wouldn't give up Hilary for any man on earth. She's my own child. . . ." She clasped Hilary to her. "My duty lies with her."

"Don't cant about duty to me, Viola!" he shouted, in a loud angry voice that startled Hilary so that she began to whimper and cry with fear. "If you had ever had any sense of duty Hilary wouldn't be in the world to-day!"

"But since she is in the world—poor darling baby—I'm going to keep her always where she has every right to be. With me."

"Viola, you don't mean to tell me that you've *refused* Bennet?" His voice was raised almost to a hoarse scream.

"Certainly I've refused him. He'll be glad one of these days. He wouldn't have been really happy—he would have brooded over things."

"You must be mad!" shouted Matthew, who was paying no attention to her words. "Even if you hadn't cared for him you ought to have gone down on your knees to him in gratitude! Why, it was the chance of a lifetime! And it wasn't as if you

hadn't encouraged him. You were seen more than once walking in the dusk together. And he told me he was prepared to accept the conditions laid down by your Church—that he'd thought better of your Church ever since he'd known you. But he made it quite plain that you must give up Hilary. I agreed with him. I saw it was the only course to adopt. People can't mix their children like that. You were to turn a clean page, make a fresh start. And now just for a whim you mean to chuck away the best chance you're ever likely to have."

"It is not a whim. Hilary is my child, and I have my duty toward her. My duty isn't changed because through no fault of mine she isn't legitimate." She rose now and faced him. "Do you think I'd leave her with you, Matthew, in a place where she was cut off from her religion and had no one to teach her about it? Do you think I'd abandon her to be brought up without any love at all, just as I was, to be licked into shape, as you call it, by you? Never!" Her eyes flashed; she looked splendid then, simple, but infinitely tragic.

"I'd bring Hilary up to behave herself. I know it's not kind to the child to surfeit it with indulgence and petting. Correction is necessary."

"I was brought up without love, after my mother died," said Viola, bitterly, "and I know what it means. And I was corrected, as you call it, and I know what that means. So I'm going to keep Hilary with me till she doesn't want me any longer, and while she's with me she shall be as happy as I can make her."

"All this is beside the mark, Viola," stormed Matthew; "we are not discussing Hilary's future but yours. You shall marry Bennet—I insist upon it!" His red-brown eyes gleamed with rage under the bushy penthouse brows. "You shan't stay here in any case—a nameless woman with a nameless

brat! You've told your story to Bennet, and do you think he'll keep it to himself after the way you've treated him? The whole island will know what my sister is, and I've always held up my head here among my fellow-planters. A nice way of showing your gratitude to me! I've been respected all the years I've lived in Ceylon. And now you've come here to smirch my name, and you refuse to take this simple means of whitewashing yourself. Bennet's a young fool, but he's got money, and he means business. You're years younger than he is and he's a widower, so no one can say he was caught in your toils!"

"Please stop, Matthew. I really can't bear any more. And he understands—he knows I must be faithful to Hilary. . . ."

She moved away. Matthew followed her with his eyes. Rage and hatred were in the look he gave her, mingled with a certain wondering incomprehension. She wasn't in the least dazzled by the brilliancy of Bennet's offer. She had simply thrown it aside, scarcely considering it, although she had certainly seemed to like the man, and there was much in it to tempt any woman, especially one who had a great deal to gain by making such a marriage. But then Matthew had never been able to make Viola realize her own ambiguous, anomalous position. She didn't seem to mind. She had deliberately chosen to be nameless; she had chosen too that Hilary should be nameless. She had thrown away every chance that had been offered to her. It would serve her right if when Hilary grew up she should renounce this religion for which her mother had paid so dearly, and for which she had made such quixotic sacrifices. Oh, Hilary wouldn't thank her if she grew up to be the girl Matthew took her for! She would resent it, and probably in her young de-

spair she would fling aside the very thing that Viola had staked all to secure for her.

When he was angry he liked to think that Viola would be sorry one of these days for her fatal obstinacy. She would regret, too, that she hadn't followed his advice. There was a nice moment awaiting her when Hilary grew to years of discretion, and arrived at that age when girls seem least able to be influenced by their mothers.

Viola went into the nursery. She put Hilary on the bed, with a precious new doll, purchased in Colombo.

"My brother is very angry with me, Rebecca. I expect we shall have to leave Kellioya."

"I should be very sorry to do that, ma'am," said Rebecca.

"Should you? Why?" inquired Viola, secretly astonished.

"Well, ma'am, it's so peaceful—so out of the world. So good for Baby . . ."

"Oh, yes, it is all that. But for you and me, Rebecca—"

"Oh, we can put up with a good deal, ma'am, for Miss Hilary," said Rebecca.

"I think you're right, Rebecca."

"I've always said she ought to be our first consideration, ma'am," said Rebecca, sententiously.

"Yes. I've certainly made her mine."

"You'll never be sorry for that, ma'am."

Viola sat by the bed and began to play with Hilary, who was a little tired and fractious after her journey. But she was always patient with her, and knew how to coax her back into a good humor. She could not, however, chase away her own feeling of sadness. There had been something very enchanting about the thought of returning to a world where everyone was kind and welcoming, where the tragedy of the past could be, if not forgotten, at

least relegated to obscurity. A world, too, where she would not always be in disgrace. And yet she had never hesitated. She had accepted the simple gray lot of remaining in the wilderness with her baby.

"She *must* love me, she must," she thought.

With her tumbled crinkly hair Hilary was looking very like her father. She often had his proud and wilful expression in her little face. Already she was hard and determined and resolute like Esmé.

"If she's a good Catholic she'll understand," Viola thought.

Everything depended upon that. If, when Hilary learned the truth, she was able to say to her mother, "I'd rather have my faith than anything else you could have given me," all would be well. But there was in most young lives a period when faith meant a little less, when its flame burned perhaps a little more dimly. Many of the saints even had passed through that bitter experience. It was the age when the world and its toys and prizes offered an enchanting seductive allure that eclipsed for the moment eternal things. Viola had known such a time herself when she had consented unconditionally to marry Esmé. Love could sometimes plunge a very young and untried girl into that bitter conflict with faith, warring in her heart for the mastery. That had been her own lot, and faith had been temporarily defeated in the struggle by that passion of love which Esmé had evoked within her. But afterward she had felt the horror and shame and tragedy of being separated through her own wilful, malicious, and deliberate fault from those holy things that were part of her heritage. She had learned the worth of them, their vital eternal significance, in that period of fiery suffering. It had made her resolve to offer any sacrifice rather than to let Hilary be deprived of her spiritual inheritance. And blindly, obstinately,

in face of all temptation, she had clung to that resolve, shutting out, as she was doing now, all temporal advantages from her own life. . . .

At dinner that night Matthew said to her, after a few moments of stormy silence: "I had a visit from Keane after you'd gone to your room. He tells me that Garth Bennet has left Ceylon and won't be back here for a long time. He went to England last week, and he's putting a manager on Madura. Keane is to keep an eye on the place, too. It's the best thing he could have done in the circumstances. Keane says there's a girl at home his people want him to marry."

"I knew he had gone," said Viola. "I saw him in Colombo the night before he sailed." Her voice was cold and proud. Try as he would, Matthew could discover no hint of regret in it.

She was hardly thinking of Bennet then. Her eyes were somberly regarding the gray avenue of years down which she must pass.

"So there's no reason for you to leave Kellioya," continued Matthew; "you can stop on if you like." His anger had subsided. Viola was still to him the goose who laid the golden eggs, swelling ever his already handsome store of rupees in the Colombo bank.

"Thank you, Matthew. As you know, I don't at all wish to go away."

Whether this was a reprieve or a fresh sentence of imprisonment, she could not tell. But it was a relief to feel that she could once more settle down at Kellioya for an indefinite period, with Hilary, who thrived so well in that salubrious mountain climate.

CHAPTER XVIII

“COME in out of the sun, my precious!”
 “Shan’t, mummy.” Hilary’s voice came crisp and decisive from the other end of the garden, where she was playing under the shade of the eucalyptus trees. It was a brilliant day in March, a time of the year when people were unanimously fleeing from the great heat of Colombo to the cooler regions of the hills.

At Kellioya it was one of the most charming moments of the year. The warm, fine days succeeded each other with uninterrupted splendor, and the garden was a blaze of flowers. An endless chain of white butterflies, journeying in so compact a squadron that it almost seemed as if an invisible link joined them together, had been flying all day across the garden in an unbroken, continuous string. They would fly in this way perhaps for several days, united in their deliberate and collective seeking of some unknown and mysterious bourne.

Hilary delighted in the butterflies. She did not attempt to touch them, for she was afraid of hurting their pretty, fragile wings, and besides she liked to watch them passing like pale winged flowers.

She was five years old now, a lovely, dainty creature with the cut features, the clear green eyes, the proud wilful look of Esmé Craye. Her hat had slipped back, displaying the fair crinkled hair that grew close and thick to her head like a boy’s.

Viola was sitting in the veranda, keeping an eye on the child but never disturbing her in her games. Still, it was getting hot, and she would have to come in soon, and perhaps do a few lessons before she went to have her morning sleep. Just ten minutes more . . . and then she would go out and fetch her.

Viola leaned back in her wicker-chair and lan-

guidly took up a copy of the *Queen*, now some weeks old. Cecily had sent her a bundle of English papers. It was a kind thought.

She scanned the advertisements, half envying the power of women in England to purchase becoming and fashionable raiment at so low a price. She sighed. Her white dress, made by a queer old native tailor in the back veranda, did not in the least resemble these recent charming modes.

Two years and a half had gone over her head since that visit to Colombo when she had seen Garth Bennet for the last time. He had never returned to Ceylon, and had married more than a year ago a girl who was said to be very pretty and charming. Already they had one little girl. Keane used to bring Viola news sometimes of the household at Stonewood.

Keane had his elder son David with him now, and together they worked Madura as well as their own estate. Viola liked David Keane, a handsome, energetic boy who was rapidly becoming his father's right hand. So there had been changes in the district, though they had not affected her. But Matthew, discovering one day that she could keep accounts with neat and meticulous accuracy, permitted her to undertake the estate books. Thus she had work to do, and she was glad of it. She typed his business letters for him, filing the carbon copies. In all her work she was exact and punctual. Matthew said little, for he was a firm believer in the distressing theory that praise "turned people's heads." So he did not commend, although he would pounce upon the least error or inaccuracy with singular ferocity. Viola was very submissive, and the work gave her occupation, an interest, too, in the affairs of the estate. At his request she had also, not without misgivings, invested some of her little capital in Kellioya. An adjoining estate came into

the market, and as it had long been a Naboth's vineyard to Matthew, he bought it. Money was required to develop it, and as he disliked borrowing at a high rate of interest he suggested that some of Viola's capital should be used for the purpose. At first she refused, feeling that it would make it more and more difficult for her to leave Ceylon if she wished to do so. But a nerve-racking scene followed her refusal, and for peace sake she gave way. She received no interest on her money, Matthew retained it all, as he said, for her keep.

Since she had had some insight into his affairs, she had discovered that Matthew must now be a very rich man. Rich and miserly. He never offered to give her any remuneration for her work, nor to reduce the annual sum he extorted for her own board and Hilary's. Moreover, he had complete control now over part of her money.

This thought disturbed her, because it had never been her intention to keep Hilary in Ceylon when she had reached an age to begin her education seriously. She had always resolved to send her to a convent school, either in Italy or in England, and make a home for her in the holidays. This time was now approaching, for Hilary was advanced and precocious for her five years, and lessons must soon begin in good earnest.

"Really, Viola, if you don't insist upon that child obeying you, we shall be having her laid up with sun-stroke." Matthew's voice, loud, exasperated, nerve-racking as ever, struck a discordant note across these reflections.

"Hilary doesn't mind the sun. But I'll fetch her in soon."

"She must be made to mind *you*," said Matthew.

"She can stay there ten minutes more—it won't hurt her."

"I'll fetch her in! It's time she learned to obey!"

He half rose, but Viola put out a pale, detaining hand.

"No—you're so rough with her, Matthew. You treat her like a school-boy. She's afraid of you."

"A jolly good thing she's afraid of someone!"

Viola said quietly: "I don't want her to be afraid of anyone. It only makes children into little liars. Besides, she isn't naughty, Matthew."

"She's disobedient and impertinent. If I had my way—"

"Oh, I know." Her voice was weary.

"Well, if she were my child—!"

"Yes?" She leaned forward a little, fixing her dark grave eyes upon him. Her voice, for all that it was so cold, seemed to convey a challenge.

"Perhaps I'd better not say."

"I suppose you'd beat her—a poor little baby of five!"

"Five? She's nearly six. And she has hereditary tendencies. I thought you were obliged to believe in original sin!"

Matthew's temper had grown worse of late years. It needed all her patience, all her self-abnegation, to bear with him at times. And if only he wouldn't vent it on poor little Hilary!

She laughed now at his speech about original sin. Matthew thought the laugh unnatural. There was nothing to laugh at in the spectacle of Hilary's uncorrected disobedience. Indeed he had found few things in life to tickle his sense of humor, while many, including Viola and Hilary, were wont to arouse his fiercest indignation.

"You should have been a schoolmaster, Matthew, not a tea-planter."

Matthew sprang up from his chair. The vision of a now hatless Hilary dancing in mock pursuit of the endless, moving chain of white butterflies was altogether too much for his composure. Mother

and child both required a salutary lesson, Viola quite as much as her disgraceful little daughter. Before Viola could stop him he had descended the steps into the garden, rushed across the lawn, and arrested the dancing little nymph-like figure that was poised so gracefully against the vivid background of green.

It was too late to interfere. Viola watched the little scene not without trepidation. Of course Matthew wouldn't hurt her. He would carry her into the house, struggling and crying, overwhelmed with anger and fear. There would be a scene. She sighed. . . .

"If I weren't here," she thought. "But I *am* here," she comforted herself.

Matthew's huge, ungainly form, for the years had not dealt kindly with him and had increased his bulk, stood giant-like beside the little slender figure with its uncovered silver-fair hair. He grasped her arm with rough strength. "Didn't you hear your mother call? You're to come in at once!"

Hilary struggled to release herself from that iron grip that was bruising her tender flesh. She stamped her foot.

"Go away, Uncle Matt! I hate you—I hate you!"

"You'd hate me a little more if I gave you what you really want," he answered, grimly.

"I don't want *you*!"

"No, but you want the soundest spanking a little girl ever had!"

He clapped his hands smartly as if to give her some idea of the procedure. Finding herself thus unexpectedly released, Hilary danced away from him, darting after a gorgeous butterfly that floated indolently past with iridescent wings boldly marked in scarlet and gold.

She leapt into the air with an agile, childish movement, lifting her little hands while the butterfly

sailed out of reach. Matthew approached her unseen and caught her in his arms. He wasn't going to be flouted by the brat! He lifted her from the ground, and Hilary found herself held as in a vise. She screamed and kicked, and then proceeded to belabor his face with her two small fists. A well-directed smart blow upon his nose aroused Matthew's real anger. He put her down, just in front of the veranda, and taking her hands in one of his proceeded with the other to inflict a number of cruelly severe blows. At the second blow Hilary realized that this was no game. She shrieked with pain and terror, but the hard slaps rained down inexorably. Matthew had lost all control of himself, and he put forth his whole strength. His eyes were ablaze with an ugly fury that made him look like a madman. Viola rushed to the spot, and in dragging Hilary away received the last blows upon her own hands.

She gathered the child in her arms, kissing and comforting her, while Hilary wrung her hands, all bruised and scarlet and aflame from those sounding stripes.

"Give her to me—you shan't have her!" said Matthew, following them into the veranda. His look and tone were so fierce that Viola wondered if she were dealing with a madman.

"Don't dare to touch her again," she exclaimed.

"Give her to me—she hasn't had nearly enough—" he stormed.

He made a rush toward them. Hilary gave a piercing scream and clung to her mother. Then something happened, so quickly and suddenly that Viola was never afterward able to give any succinct account of it either to herself or anyone else. Her brother lurched forward, and suddenly all power seemed to leave him; he tried to approach her and could not. He fell back heavily into a chair and his

head dropped to one side. His face changed and became suffused, congested, purple. His breath came in loud stertorous gasps.

Viola was appalled. She felt sure that he must be very ill. Perhaps this fit of violent, uncontrolled anger had brought on a stroke. For some time past he had complained of his head, and he had been much redder in the face of late than he used to be. But he had never been really ill; he had not missed a single day's work through illness all the time Viola had been at Kellioya. She was aghast at the sight he now presented, and believed that he must be actually dying. She shouted for the servants, and then dragging Hilary with her went in search of Rebecca.

"Rebecca," she panted, "keep Hilary with you. My brother's been taken ill—I'm afraid he's had a stroke. He was very angry with Hilary—look at her poor little hands how he's hurt them—he looked as if he wanted to kill her—and then all of a sudden he fell into a chair and became unconscious. I must go back to him."

She was tremulous and excited.

Rebecca examined Hilary's hands with an expression of extreme disgust.

"Well, it's a judgment on him then, that's all I can say. Torturing a poor baby like this!"

"Oh, don't say that, Rebecca. Perhaps he wasn't feeling quite himself and we irritated him. Stay with Rebecca, my precious darling." She kissed the tear-stained face. It was Hilary's first authentic experience of pain, and she was still trembling and shaking.

"I hate Uncle Matthew! He's a bad, wicked man!" She clenched the wounded hands.

Viola hurried away. The servants had managed to raise Matthew and were half carrying, half dragging him to his room. It required all their united

efforts to lift the huge unconscious man on to his bed, where he lay gasping and snorting in a manner that filled them with terror.

A messenger was despatched at once to Nuwara Eliya to summon the doctor, while another went off in hot haste to inform Mr. Keane. The bungalow was full of sounds, or voices and hurrying footsteps; it seemed as if it had been awakened from a long sleep, and all its monotonous order and punctuality shattered by the sudden tragic event of the master's illness.

Viola never left his side. Would he ever recover consciousness? Such a death as that, accelerated by a paroxysm of cruel rage and violence, seemed to her almost the most terrible thing that could have happened.

And what would become of them—herself and Hilary—if he died? Although she had lived for several years at Kellioya, Matthew had never alluded to the eventual disposal of his property. The transferring of her money to him had been done somewhat informally, and he always got angry if she spoke of it or asked for security. Money was the one subject which he could not bring himself to discuss temperately. Would his death leave her ruined? The estate was his own; he could bequeath it where he would, and it would be difficult for her to substantiate her claim to a loan of which there was no record.

The doctor arrived in the early hours of the following day, having ridden almost the whole distance from Nuwara Eliya. Mr. Keane and David were both staying at Kellioya for the night, to be at hand in case Viola needed help. From the first she had taken a hopeless view of the case, and when the doctor came he could only confirm her fears. There was little probability of Matthew's ever recovering consciousness, or of speaking or recognizing anyone

again. He diagnosed the malady as one of the acutest forms of apoplexy, producing rapid paralysis of all the limbs, and generally resulting in death in a few hours.

At half past ten on the following morning Matthew Hudson died. He had neither moved nor spoken, and it was strange that in death his queer, rugged, massive face should have become once more so pale and calm.

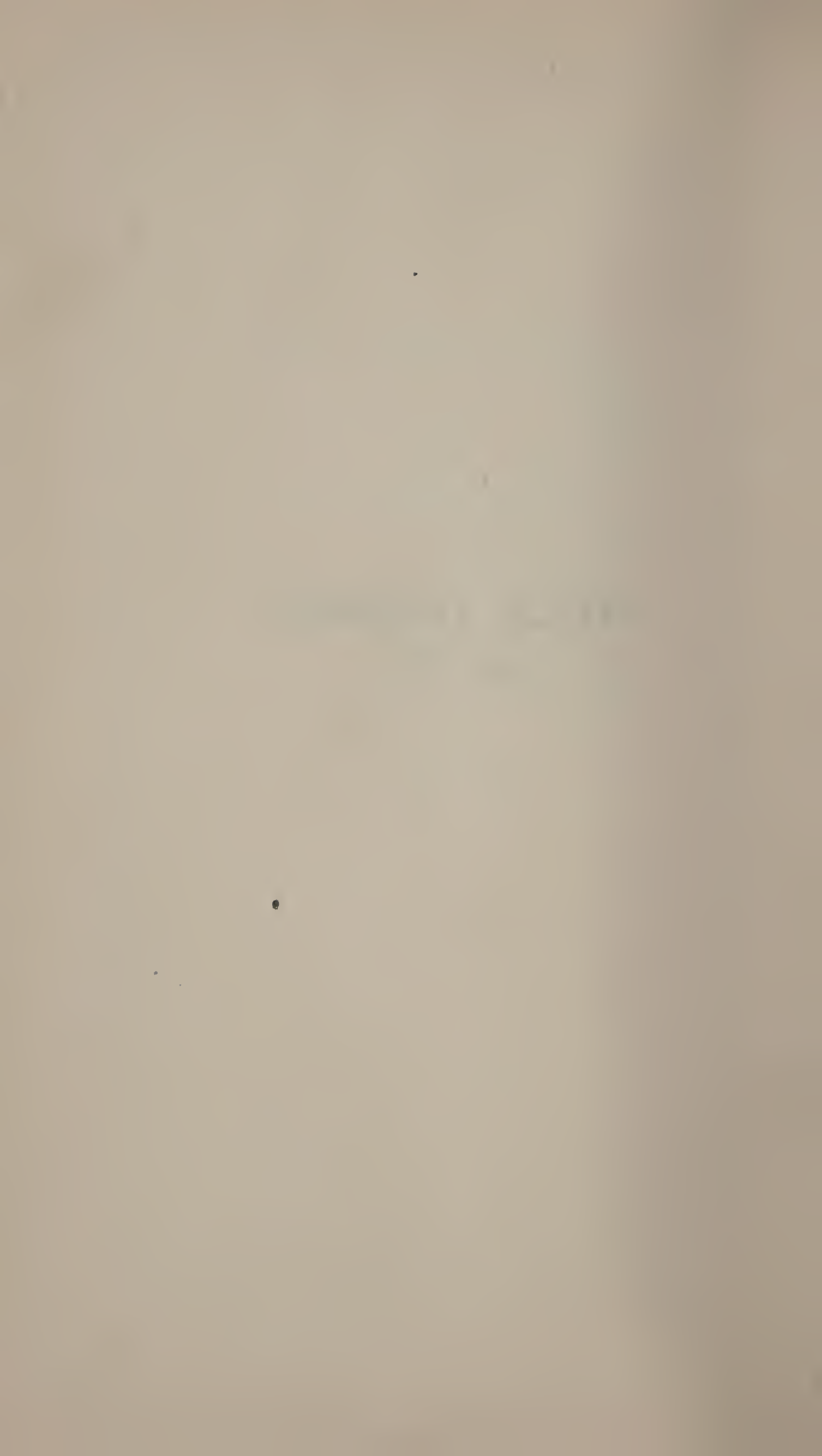
Some months before, he had entrusted his will to Keane's keeping, and when this document was opened, duly attested by five witnesses, of whom Keane himself had been one, it was found that he had left the whole of his property, real and personal, wheresoever and whatsoever, to his sister Viola Hudson, known as Mansfield, for her sole use and enjoyment. The fortune was a considerable one, for Matthew had constantly bought and sold land in Ceylon, and he had put by every rupee that he could. Kellioya was famed for its tea, and its value was increasing every year. It was Viola's now to do exactly as she liked with. She was a rich woman, and she was free. . . .

She resolved to take Hilary back to Europe.

END OF BOOK II

VIOLA HUDSON

BOOK III



VIOLA HUDSON

BOOK III

CHAPTER I

THE immense snowy peaks, rising above the dense bar of gray cloud that enfolded like a furry blanket the lower slopes of the Alps, were touched to rose-color in the sunset. They were clear, hard and defined; remote from the shadows that were beginning to fill the valley with dusky veils of blue. The Lake of Como caught something of the rosy light from the illumination of the sky, and across it Viola Mansfield could see the houses and graceful campanile of Bellagio shining with a golden jewel-like radiance.

Along the lakeside the Spring was beginning to reveal itself in vague tentative effort, with flowers and blossoms rather than with leaves, as is almost always the way in Italy. The villa gardens displayed thickets of crimson rhododendrons, and avenues of tall camellia trees, stately and dark-leaved and starred liberally with wonderful rose-colored flowers. The white and pink of cherry blossom showed among the first delicately bronzed leaves, and shook its pale froth amid the groves of gnarled and ancient olive-trees. Gay carpets of tulips, cinerarias, and anemones made brilliant patches between the spaces of young grass. Wistaria was beginning to ripple its violet foam over old gray walls, filling the air with its sharp almond fra-

grance. A dim mist of purple hung over a group of Judas trees. There was even a trickle of emerald on the gaunt knots of the vines that guard so closely all through the winter the secret of their fresh young foliage and golden bunches of fruit.

The snow-air from the Alps still chilled the valley. Looking northward, beyond the winding turquoise of the lake, one could see the snow fields spreading upon those lofty and remote summits. The pink glow was fading a little now, giving place to a cold violet blue.

Viola Mansfield gave a little shiver and went indoors. She found Hilary sitting pensively beside a crackling wood fire.

"I've made tea, Mummie," she said, as her mother entered the room.

"I thought you were going to the Meades' this afternoon, Hilary."

"No—they've got a fresh lot of people from England there. And I hate it then—I feel so out of it!"

Mrs. Mansfield glanced a little anxiously at her tall young daughter—taller by half a head than she was herself. Hilary was rather more than seventeen now, and she was old and assured for her years. She was perhaps more unusual-looking than very pretty, although artists—and there were always a great many staying or living along the Lake of Como—had frequently called her beautiful. Her fair hair with the deep crinkle in it showed charming golden tints, and crowned her small head like an aureole. She had clear green eyes—*vert de mer*, as a French artist had once called them—set under long dark eyebrows and fringed thickly with black lashes. She looked with a frank gaze upon a world of which she had so far no fear. She had one passion in her young life—her love for her mother. They were more like two sisters than mother and daughter to look at, but they had the wide diver-

gence of outlook that necessarily divides arbitrarily one generation from another.

At thirty-seven Viola was still very young-looking. She was almost more beautiful now, though something of the radiance of her early loveliness had gone. She was strong, active as a girl, with much of the eagerness of youth still visible in her sensitive face. It was only the fact of her possessing such a grown-up daughter as Hilary, that seemed in a sense to age her.

For eleven years Viola had lived in the little villa she still inhabited on the shores of Lake Como. It had been a very happy home to both herself and Hilary. She had bought it with some of the money Matthew had left her.

Hilary had been educated at a convent school in Florence and had only lately returned home for good. She was sorry when the time came for her to leave, although she was perfectly happy with her mother and had even dreaded the school terms that had interposed so inexorably to separate them. But during her last term a change had come over her. She seemed to have put away quite definitely the things of a child. She had looked out upon the future with her serene young gaze, realizing its possibilities. But it seemed to her that whatever her vocation might prove to be, it would entail leaving her mother, and this thought hurt her. Viola was her whole world. . . .

Viola knew nothing of these hopes and fears. She did not question her daughter. She left Hilary perfectly free. But she knew in her heart that this child of hers was a creature of precocious development, both physically and spiritually. It might be that to her the choice of a vocation would come very early. And then the old doubt would arise to torment Viola. Had she done well to keep Hilary in ignorance of her parentage? She had not wished to

cloud the child's happy, care-free youth with the knowledge of that tragedy that had so overshadowed her own.

Hilary poured out tea, waiting prettily on her mother. Then she said suddenly:

"Mummie, don't you think that now I'm nearly grown up we might go to England? I should so like to go."

Viola paused. "I'm afraid there's no chance of my being able to take you there just now," she said, in a hurried, evasive voice. "What made you think of it?"

She looked at Hilary almost with terror in her eyes.

"Joyce made me think of it. She says it's so odd our living here from year's end to year's end. Never going home. . . ."

"Many English people spend their lives in Italy," Viola said, in an odd, constrained, unconvincing tone.

"But when they do," said Hilary, her courage increasing, "there's generally something—queer—about them. Something that prevents them from showing their faces in England. Or else—they haven't any relations there."

Viola's face was very pale; she turned it a little away from Hilary's clear gaze—those young eyes of *vert de mer* color. Esmé had had just those eyes in the days of his innocent, eager boyhood. . . .

The girl came across the room and entwined her mother with warm, loving arms. There was just a hint of protection in her attitude—she was so much the bigger and stronger of the two. "Mummie, darling," she said, coaxingly, "don't let's pretend to each other that there's nothing odd about it. You know it and I know it. It all comes of you and—and my father having been separated while he was still alive. Now don't say it doesn't! I'm old enough to know

much more about it." She leaned over Viola and pressed her glowing young cheek to her mother's. "I'm really old enough to know just why you quarreled."

"Oh, it isn't that you're not old enough, darling," said Viola, in a hurried, nervous voice that betrayed both fear and emotion. "I've always treated you as if you were someone of my own age. A younger sister rather than a daughter. I didn't want you to feel the barrier of years when you had only me. But it is—it is that it hurts me so to speak of the past, Hilary. There were things that I can't bear even now to talk about—things that are as old as you are, Hilary."

Her face under the cloud of dark silken hair was pallid, troubled. Hilary, not moving, loving the close contact as she always did, could not see the startled look that had come into her mother's eyes, giving them almost an expression of wildness, as if something were pursuing her, menacingly, to her hurt. . . .

When Hilary spoke like that, demanding as it were to be told more fully the story of her mother's life, it seemed to bring the day of revelation so close that Viola could almost feel its icy breath upon her face.

"Mummie, I really think I could make it quite square between you and my father's people. Whatever the quarrel was they couldn't possibly be so very angry after eighteen years. And I should like to know them. I should like to hear all they can tell me about—my father. I'm sure he must have been a very wonderful person or you wouldn't have loved him."

Viola released herself gently. The touch of Hilary was almost unbearable then.

"Hilary, if anything else had been possible, you

know that for your sake I should have tried to do it long ago."

"I'm sure he must have loved you very much," proceeded Hilary, calmly reflective. "You're so beautiful, Mummie. Mrs. Meade thinks you're the prettiest woman she's ever seen. She told Joyce," with a happy little laugh, "that I should never be a patch on you! Still, all the same, I think my grandparents might like to see me. Their own grandchild, too. I'm a credit to you, don't you think so, Mummie? Healthy and tall, and not too hideous! I really believe I should produce an excellent impression upon them!"

"I'm sure you would," said Viola, with unconscious dryness.

"Then why, darling Mummie?"

"Hilary, be kind to me! Don't talk about it any more. You must give up this dream of going to England. I can only tell you that if it had been possible I should have tried to change things, but always—always, do you understand?—it's been impossible!" Viola rose from her seat. She laid her hand lightly on Hilary's shoulder. "I am going to Benediction."

"I'll come with you," said Hilary, suddenly sobered. She was no longer unmindful of that note of urgent appeal in her mother's voice.

There was a mystery—just as Joyce Meade had suggested. People didn't stay away from their own country for years and years unless there was a grave, imperative reason. And it was something that her mother couldn't bear to speak of. Something that made her look all white and shaken. . . .

Soon they were walking up the steep, flagged path that led to the church. It stood amid the houses of the old village, perched high above the modern little lakeside town with its big hotels and smart shops and restaurants, that catered almost exclusively for the

endless stream of tourists that thronged the place at all seasons of the year.

Hilary loved her Italian home. She had never before betrayed any desire to leave it. Her memories of Ceylon had grown remote and shadowy, although sometimes the almost fierce perfumes of hothouse flowers could evoke them. She had confused visions then of dark faces beneath white turbans, and a great angry man who had hurt and frightened her.

Matthew Hudson had not left an agreeable impression upon his niece's subconsciousness; he had taught her the twin lessons of fear and dislike. Viola had, however, long ago forgiven him. He had been kind to her in his own queer, rough way, and he had left her amply provided for. Hilary would have quite a substantial dowry if she chose to marry.

They climbed the hill in silence, both perhaps thinking of that recent conversation. To Viola it had been quite a momentous one. That sudden petition to go to England, to know more of her father's family, had shown her that Hilary was getting a little restive. She was too mindful of her own girlhood not to recognize the symptoms of that restless desire for change which is after all but a sign of wholesome youth. Yes, it was little more than eighteen years ago since she had lounged on the sofa in the fog-dimmed London room, rebelling secretly but passionately against her lot. It was the day that had brought Lady Bethnell, whose coming had initiated the first act of the little tragedy.

But Hilary was still thinking obstinately of her dead father. Joyce Meade had sown the elements of suspicion in her mind. "Who *was* your father, Hilary? Don't you remember him at all? How long's he been dead? And why didn't he and your mother live together?"

Hilary did not care particularly for Joyce, but she was one of the few English girls of her own age in the neighborhood. They were perforce fairly intimate, and Hilary was frequently invited to the huge palatial villa with its splendid show gardens that attracted visitors from all parts of the world. Hilary had flushed a little under the storm of questions. She felt the sting of Joyce's innuendoes.

"I've never asked Mummie about him," she had replied, cautiously, "I only know he died when I was very small. And I think it's cheek of *you* to ask me," she added, with indignant candor.

But Joyce was not one to be easily snubbed. Her position as the only and much admired daughter of a very wealthy man was too secure for that. But her pretty little *retroussé* face had grown suddenly spiteful as she said: "Well, I'm not the only one to ask, if you want to know. We'd all like to know a little more about Mrs. Mansfield, even though we do admire her so tremendously!"

The cool impertinent voice had stung Hilary sharply. Why did they ask such questions? Why wasn't it enough for them that her mother was beautiful and good, and far, far superior to them all? And then perhaps for the first time Hilary began to realize that her situation was, to say the least of it, an unusual one. This living perpetually abroad, for instance, and never seeing any of her other relations. . . . All her life she had known vaguely that her parents had never since she could remember lived together, but she had accepted it quite simply and had never until now asked herself or anyone else the reason why.

"It can't have been your mother's fault," Joyce had pursued, with a worldly-wise air, for she had heard the matter thoroughly discussed by her own parents. She was a little older than Hilary, and had already had a season in London and several offers of

marriage. "But you could choose to go and live with your father's people now if you liked. You are old enough, and you ought to see something of your own country."

Whereat Hilary had tossed that yellow mane of hers, replying scornfully: "As if I should ever choose to leave my mother!"

"But if they were rich they could give you a good time. You'd see a little of the world. This place is all right in spring and autumn, but it's frightfully slow all the rest of the year. I sometimes wonder how you can stick it, Hil."

Joyce had come up close to her then and taken her arm. But Hilary intensely disliked any human contact except that of her mother. Young as she was, there was something austere about her. She wriggled herself free.

"I don't find it dull. I can't imagine what you mean."

"Well, my own impression is that there must have been a divorce, and after that perhaps your father married again, or else he would certainly have claimed his right to see you some time or other."

"Catholics don't divorce," Hilary had answered, loftily. From beginning to end she had hated the discussion thus thrust upon her. It had filled her with shame and a curious instinctive repugnance; it had even made her feel a certain hostility toward Joyce Meade. In her malice there had been a touch of unaccustomed evil which Hilary's pure, limpid nature had been swift to reject. And yet it was that very conversation which had forced her to envisage her own situation, not only in regard to her mother but also in regard to herself. She had to repress a violent curiosity to learn more of this unknown man who was now dead and who had once loved her mother. For the next few days she had deliberately avoided Joyce Meade. And then this afternoon a

sudden impulse, fortified by that spirit of fierce curiosity, had impelled her for the first time to question her mother.

She was sorry now that she had done so. With Hilary repentance was wont to follow hot-foot upon the tiniest lapse. She knew that she had hurt her mother, that the wound, whatever its nature, had not healed during the long years of separation. Hilary cast furtive, longing glances at her mother. How lovely she looked in her dark winter furs. She still retained a youthful, girlish aspect, and there had been moments when Hilary had almost felt herself to be the elder of the two. She had the modern way of looking at the truth, however disagreeable, however unpalatable it might be, straight in the face.

"Mummie darling, I'm sorry; I was a beast," she whispered, slipping her arm in Viola's.

They had reached the piazza upon which the little white church with its slim spire had stood for so many hundreds of years. Outside the doors a few peasants had already congregated as well as a sprinkling of visitors from the hotels.

Viola entered the church and Hilary followed her. The interior was bare and whitewashed, but there was a lovely fragment of an ancient fresco of the Mother and Child, surviving the damp of centuries. And as in so many places around the Lake of Como the church possessed a painting by some unknown artist, of the Transfiguration. In many places in Italy a special devotion is locally emphasized; thus in the South around Naples there is scarcely a church that does not contain a painting of the Risen Christ.

As the priest carried the Blessed Sacrament in a gold Monstrance to the throne above the tabernacle, rough, fervent voices sang the *O Salutaris*. It was followed by the Litany of Loreto and a prayer. Then the *Tantum Ergo*—that magnificent chant of

pure singing worship—sounded through the church. A bell rang sharply, and the priest, raising the Monstrance in his hands, blessed the kneeling people.

Neither for Viola nor for Hilary had the service ever lost its beauty, its mystical significance.

The strong perfume of incense filled the church. Peasant voices sang the Divine Praises in a monotonous chant instead of merely reciting them as is usually the case. The sound rose with a kind of fierce fervor like a passionate profession of faith. . . .

When Hilary followed her mother out of the church her face was changed, all subdued and softened and reposeful.

It was dusk now, and the stars were beginning to show. A bat fluttered past. From the fields about them came a freshness as of falling dew. Below them were the scattered lights of the little town, and across the slim arm of the lake they could see the straight row of lamps that illuminated the strand at Bellagio, casting trembling rosy reflections into the black water. Far off, beyond the lake and the wooded hills that rose above it, they could see the great shape of Monte Grigna outlined dimly against the sky. The snows upon it pierced the dusk with a faint pallor.

The mother and daughter walked back to the little villa in silence.

CHAPTER II

WHEN Hilary went up to her room that evening to take off her hat and coat, she found Rebecca there, putting away some linen in a drawer. The maid had grown thinner and grimmer than ever, but something of indulgent tenderness showed in her harsh-featured face as the girl appeared. She took

the coat from her without a word and hung it up in the wardrobe.

Great as was her devotion to Viola, her feeling for Hilary was even more intense; there was something almost maternal in it, and she still sometimes claimed the privilege of rebuking her. The girl always took it in good part; she had a deep affection for her old nurse who, as she dimly comprehended, had followed her mother with dog-like fidelity into that exile imposed by an imperfectly-apprehended tragedy of which Viola could never be induced to speak.

In Ceylon as well as in Italy, there had always been Rebecca, grim, silent, of almost forbidding aspect, yet exhibiting a fidelity of devotion that was like a strong passion.

"Becky, did you ever see my father?" Hilary inquired, suddenly, standing in front of her with her clear green eyes fixed searchingly upon the maid's face.

There was an appreciable pause, and then Rebecca answered slowly: "Yes, Miss Hilary."

Hilary was aware of a reluctance that teased her own curiosity anew.

"Well, tell me what he was like, then!"

She sat down and motioned Rebecca to a chair.

"I hope you won't talk like that to your ma, miss," said the maid, in a tone of grave reproach, "it would hurt her very much."

"Why should it hurt her?" inquired Hilary. "Besides, we never do have any secrets from each other."

But even as she uttered the words the remembrance of their conversation that very evening rose to her mind. All that part of Viola's life which held the figure of Hilary's father was rigidly kept from her. And before even the mention of it Viola seemed to shrink and grow pale, as if the remem-

brance of that long-past tragedy could still affect her profoundly.

And it was only through the careless agency of Joyce Meade that Hilary had been forced to realize that she and her mother were still in some sense living under the cold shadow of it. . . .

"Now, Becky dear, do tell me what he was like! I'm simply enormously curious!"

Leaning forward, Hilary possessed herself of one of Rebecca's hard, gnarled hands, a gesture that seldom failed of effect.

"He was tall and fair. His hair and eyes were like yours," said the maid, at last.

She had never known the exact truth about the rupture between Hilary's father and mother, but she remembered the day when he had come to the Hudsons' house in South Kensington, pale, eager, obviously agitated, and had afterward gone away, never to return. She could only guess therefore that something very terrible must have happened to separate them, even before the child of their love was born.

"Would you have called him good-looking, Becky?" asked Hilary.

"Some people might," answered Rebecca, as if disinclined to commit herself to a definite opinion.

"Oh, I wish I could have seen him, or even a photograph of him!" exclaimed Hilary. "What a pity he died so young—he wasn't thirty, was he? If I could only go and visit his parents I should learn so much about him. It's quite time to bury that silly old hatchet, don't you think so, Becky? And then there are my Hudson uncles and aunts—I ought to know them, too. Margery is much older than I am, and she has been engaged for ages to a man with hardly any money, Mummie says. I don't think I should care for her or Lionel, but I'm sure I should like Uncle Percival."

"Yes, I think you would, miss."

"Was my father a rich man?"

"I've heard the family was very rich, miss," answered Rebecca.

"He must have loved Mummie very much," pursued Hilary, thoughtfully. "I wonder why he left off loving her?"

"I'm sure I can't tell you, miss. But," with a sudden touch of passion that made her old face work with repressed emotion, "he must have been a bad, cruel man to treat her as he did. One of your faithless sort. I wonder you can want to hear anything about him or his family!"

"Well, after all, he was my father," said Hilary, soberly. "And it isn't nice to feel that you've lots of relations in England you've never seen. And when other people begin to talk about it, too—and say things—!" She stopped abruptly, with flaming face.

"People ain't got no call to talk about other folks's affairs," retorted Rebecca, angrily. "Live and let live—that's what I always say. No one ever lost anything yet by minding their own business."

"How old about would he have been now?" asked Hilary.

Rebecca appeared to make a rapid mental calculation. "About forty-two or three," she answered.

Hilary rose, threw her arms round the old woman's neck, kissed her impulsively, and went downstairs. She had learned something, not a great deal, but the information, such as it was, had strongly stimulated her curiosity. For all that concerned this dead man whom she had never seen, had now become of the most passionate interest to her. Surely there must have been something romantic and splendid about him thus to have won her mother's love. Viola had no intimate friends, and from this Hilary had deduced the fact that she would never

have lightly given her affection, much less her love, to any man.

When she went down to the *salotto* after leaving Rebecca, Hilary saw her mother sitting quietly by the fire reading a novel, and she felt that she was regarding her from an entirely new angle. There was a touch of mystery about her, as if she lived in a remote, inaccessible region whither none could penetrate. How young she looked—how young indeed she still was. And for more than eighteen years she had lived in exile, separated even during his lifetime from the man she had once loved, and who assuredly must have loved her. . . .

The girl had always pictured her father as a much older man, over fifty perhaps, with gray hair and a beard like Mr. Meade. But now he had become in her imagination a romantic and youthful figure. Had he lived he would have been, according to Rebecca, but little over forty. Tall, fair, with odd crinkly hair and queer green eyes, like her own. . . .

For some time past Viola had realized that the friendship with Joyce Meade had offered Hilary a certain test. The Meades were rich people who made of their beautiful villa on Lake Como a holiday home. They usually spent a couple of months there twice a year, entertaining their London friends with sumptuous hospitality. Their garden was famous even in that land of lovely gardens. Joyce, like Hilary, was an only child. All that wealth could give was lavishly bestowed upon her. Her clothes were exquisite, and everything about her small attractive person was daintily perfect. But she had nothing of Hilary's wholesome beauty; that look of supple strength; that bright, spontaneous gayety and inherent sweetness of disposition. She had a dark little malicious face, very pretty, with a kind of sharp shrewish attraction. It was said that few men came to the Villa Glicine without falling in love with

her. And Joyce accepted their attentions with a cool impartial air; she knew that one day her great prospective wealth would entitle her to make a very brilliant marriage. Not yet of course, she wasn't nineteen; she intended to have a good time first. But she talked endlessly to Hilary about her matrimonial ambitions, taking her into another world where bartering and scheming seemed oddly to usurp the place of love. At first the friendship had progressed somewhat rapidly, and Viola had felt a little secret anxiety. Hilary was far too generous to envy the little creature her evident powers of attraction, indeed she had at first been disposed to give her the kind of callow worship one girl will sometimes bestow upon another a little older than herself. But a chance acid word against Catholics and their Faith achieved the idol's precipitate fall.

Hilary, silent about the affair while it was in progress, a little dazzled and bewildered by Joyce's patronizing preference, made confession of it later to her mother when her first indignant surprise and pain had subsided.

"Why didn't you tell me, Mummie?"

"I knew I could trust you to reject what you didn't feel to be quite right," Viola had answered, concealing her intense relief.

"But weren't you afraid that Joyce might influence me?"

"Not in the least."

"But she might have—she *would* have—if she hadn't said that against Catholics to me!"

"That's a very big *if* for us, Hilary."

"Well, I suppose we shall go on being friends, because I love going there and meeting people. Sometimes very clever people. But we can't go on being intimate friends."

Viola had not interfered because it was no part of her intention to shield her daughter from all con-

tact with the world, especially with the Protestant world. She wanted her to realize the inestimable gift that was hers, in relation to others as well as in relation to herself. And so far the girl's faith possessed an ardor, a limpidity, which Viola herself had never savored till she was much older and suffering had taught her its harsh, severe lessons.

"I like you to go there," Viola had said; "it's only right you should see other young people. And they are very kind."

"But you never come yourself," said Hilary, wondering.

"No"

And it was just that persistent withdrawal of Viola's that had prompted the little discussion at Villa Glicine of which the gist had subsequently reached Hilary's ears.

Mrs. Meade, an indolent fashionable woman, indifferent to her husband but devoted to her daughter, was fond of Hilary, and encouraged the friendship between the two girls. Hilary was in her opinion both simple and charming, and detached no admiration from Joyce. In fact, her height and length of limb, the bigness of her, made Joyce's small finished perfection look as delicate as a piece of china. No, there was little fear of any rivalry from that quarter. Invitations to the Villa were never lacking, and Viola thought they supplied Hilary with all the amusement her nature needed. Only this afternoon for the first time the girl had displayed that unexpected restlessness and desire for change—away from Italy. It was just as if a sudden nostalgia for England, her own land which she had never seen, had gripped her. And Viola's secret thought was: "Anything but that. I'd give her almost anything else"

Presently a note was brought in and handed to

Hilary. It proved to be from Joyce, inviting her to Villa Glicine to luncheon the following day.

Hilary scribbled a reply, only saying, "I suppose there's nothing against my lunching with the Meades to-morrow?" She was conscious of having rather neglected Joyce of late, since that conversation about her father.

"They've got a new young man staying there," said Hilary, glancing again at the letter. "Joyce says he's very charming, she wants me to see him, too. But she doesn't mention his name."

She tore up the note and threw the fragments into the glowing fire of olive-wood, watching them dreamily as they burned to fine ashes.

CHAPTER III

HILARY walked down to the lakeside, and then followed the broad white road that ran southward beyond the shops and the great hotels that were already rapidly filling with English visitors for the Spring.

It was a bright clear day, and the fragrance of Spring was in the air, wafted from fields of wild flowers on the wings of a boisterous young wind. The lake lay very calm, like a sheet of blue crystal, broken here and there by a brown sail. On the slopes the orchards wore their tremulous silver garments of blossom. Bright edges of green broke here and there the dim brown and purple tones that lay like grape-bloom upon the woodland. Across the space of shining water Bellagio looked like a little golden city in the sunlight.

She soon came in sight of the high iron gates of the Villa Glicine, which stood well back from the road upon a slight eminence, approached by a magnificent avenue of cypress trees.

The big *salotto* was unusually full of people when Hilary entered it, and across the buzz of conversation she became speedily aware of Joyce's rippling laugh. The girl was standing there, just beneath the crystal Venetian chandelier, dressed very charmingly in white. Seeing Hilary, she sprang forward eagerly to greet her. She was looking even prettier and more animated than usual.

Hilary shook hands with her hostess, and with Mr. Meade, a bald silent person who kept his opinions very much to himself, having realized long ago that they were not of the kind which would endear him to his wife and daughter. But he liked Hilary and always had a dim smile of welcome for her.

Most of those present were people who lived in the neighborhood, and Hilary knew them all slightly. She did not at first discern the young man whom Joyce had seemed so anxious for her to meet. Presently she saw him standing near the fire, talking to another man. He was about twenty-two years old, slight and boyish-looking, the face rather thin and serious, the hair and eyes dark. He had watched Hilary as she came into the room, and had thought that into the slightly enervating and artificial atmosphere of the Villa she seemed to bring something of the wild fragrance and beauty of the Spring.

"Won't you introduce me to your friend?" he said, presently, to Joyce.

"But of course you must know her. We asked her on purpose to meet you," said Joyce, frankly. She went up to Hilary saying:

"Hil, I want to introduce Mr. Kenneth Bennet to you."

He took Hilary's hand. "Mrs. Meade's been telling me that your mother used to live in Ceylon. So did my father when I was quite a little chap—

he had an estate there called Madura, but he's sold it now."

"Yes, we were both out there living with my mother's brother," said Hilary, "but I hardly remember it at all. We came to Italy when he died." She gave him these details quite simply.

Hilary had never heard the name of Bennet in connection with those early Ceylon days, consequently it conveyed nothing to her. At luncheon Kenneth sat between her and Joyce, dividing his conversation fairly equally between the two, a fact which Miss Meade, who wished to claim it all, secretly resented. She divined that for some reason or other his interest in Hilary was sharply stimulated by the fact that she had been in Ceylon.

Quite apart from this, however, Kenneth was interested in Hilary herself. When he turned his grave eyes toward her he was struck afresh by the splendid type of girlhood she presented. Tall, supple, strong, she looked like a young goddess. Those clear green eyes enchanted him. At home his stepmother was a sickly neurotic woman, and he had begun to associate all women with failing health and irritable nerves. But Hilary Mansfield didn't look as if she possessed such things as nerves. He felt almost grateful to her for her aspect of splendid health, her bright wholesome beauty.

As she sat down he noticed that she crossed herself. He gave her a sharp look and said: "Are you a Catholic?"

"Yes. Are you?" said Hilary.

"Yes. My father was a convert. I was only seven at the time, and of course he brought me up as one. I went to Catholic schools."

Hilary thought: "Surely, Joyce won't want to marry him when she know he's a Catholic. She's always scoffed at our Faith."

Her interest in Kenneth was awakened by this

disclosure. "Oh, do tell me about your father! I like to hear of conversions—they always seem so wonderful—such miracles."

"I don't know very much about it," he confessed. "The only thing he did tell me was that he once knew a very good woman who was a Catholic, and that started him thinking about it. He heard her saying a prayer once that impressed him very much—he always said it every day afterward—and it ended in his becoming a Catholic himself."

"I wonder what it was," said Hilary, softly.

"I can tell you that, because he urged me always to say it," said Kenneth, coloring slightly and speaking very low so that no one else could hear. "It was, *Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, I trust in Thee.*"

As if confused by the intimate character of this revelation he turned abruptly away and began to talk to Joyce. It was inexplicable even to himself that he should have told Hilary that little episode of his father's life. She was such a complete stranger . . . and yet she had not somehow seemed like a stranger.

Hilary was slightly startled because the prayer was a favorite one of her mother's, and ever since she could remember, Viola had taught her to say it not once but many times during the day. And it was this that had wrought the wonderful miracle of a conversion . . . perhaps because this appeal to the Sacred Heart of Our Lord, one of the most profoundly mystical of all devotions, was never suffered to fall unheeded.

Joyce was annoyed at the friendliness that had sprung up so swiftly between Kenneth and Hilary. All the time he was talking to her she felt that he was only doing so out of politeness, and that he really wanted to talk to Hilary. She was so accustomed to relegating Hilary to an obscure position in the background, to be taken out and played with

when there was no one more interesting about, that she had come to underrate her significance.

As the only son of a very rich man, Kenneth possessed a certain importance in her eyes. His cold reserved manner had piqued her, during his brief stay at the Villa. But something of his coldness and reserve seemed to vanish when he talked to Hilary Mansfield.

"I want to make a study of some of these North Italian cathedrals and churches," he told Hilary, presently. "I expect you know them pretty well, don't you?"

"Not well," she answered, "but I've seen a good many of them. It's very old-fashioned, I know, but my mother and I often go sight-seeing!"

She laughed.

"Sight-seeing? Why, I should think so! It's what one comes to Italy for. I've been to Rome and Florence, but all this part round here is quite unknown to me. We might go together perhaps—" He looked at her quite eagerly when he made this suggestion, as if he feared that she might refuse.

But Hilary only said: "I shall be delighted."

"You're not eating anything," he remarked, presently, when Hilary, having partaken of some macaroni, refused two meat dishes in succession, eating only some vegetables.

"But it's a Saturday in Lent," she explained, with a smile.

"Oh, do you keep Saturdays here? In England our *maigre* days are Wednesday and Friday. I must remember next week—it's too late to-day. I've already had some meat."

"I've never been in England," said Hilary.

"Never been in England?" His astonishment was intense. "But why on earth—?"

Hilary answered shortly, with a vivid remem-

brance of her recent conversation with Joyce, "My mother doesn't care for it."

"I'd like you to see Stonewood—our house in Gloucestershire. It's right away on the Cotswolds, miles from anywhere. We have our own chapel in the house and there's a church only two miles away. My father's very devout. He spent a great deal on the chapel. It's rather wonderful—you'd love it."

"I'm sure I should," said Hilary.

She had an almost aching desire to go to England, to see Stonewood, to learn something of English life. All of a sudden she felt that she had been unjustly deprived of something to which she had a right. For after all she was English, and there was no earthly reason why she should live always in exile. People were invariably surprised to find that she had never been in England, and now there was an additional sting in the thought that unpleasant reasons had been suggested to account for it, by malicious tongues. She wished her mother would go there even if it were only to silence those lying reports.

Before she left that afternoon Kenneth had managed to say to her with an eagerness he did not try to conceal:

"Where do you live? May I come and see you?"

"Oh, do come—we shall be delighted. Come to tea. Our house is just above the town—you go up a steep path as if you were going to the church."

"I'm ashamed to say I haven't been inside the church since I came. It's a long way isn't it?"

"I'll show you the way when you come to see us. Our house stands on the left—we call it Villa Viola after my mother."

"Which day may I come?"

"To-morrow, if that suits you," said Hilary,

gravely. "I'm sure my mother will like to talk about Ceylon to you."

"Is your mother at all like you?"

Hilary gave a delicious little laugh. "Oh, no—she's very beautiful. Ask Mrs. Meade."

He glanced at her sharply then as if to discover whether she were "fishing." But her fresh young face was suffused with a kind of rapture of enthusiasm, very authentic and charming.

"You must be devoted to her," he said, almost enviously.

"Of course I am. You see, we're alone, she and I. We're like sisters."

He had an odd longing to know more of Hilary Mansfield. Mrs. Meade would perhaps be able to tell him something, since the two girls seemed to be on fairly intimate terms. He was not as a rule at all susceptible, but he was compelled to acknowledge to himself that Hilary had made a certain and very definite impression upon him. Of course it didn't mean anything. He would probably go away in a week or two and forget all about her. Yet for the first time in his life he felt that he could be friends with a woman. Hilary seemed to him so sane, so poised, so normal. He contrasted her aspect of blooming healthy youth with the haggard neurotic beauty of his stepmother.

Neither Mrs. Meade nor Joyce were too well pleased to learn that an invitation to tea at Villa Viola had been accepted by Kenneth for the following afternoon. Mrs. Meade had been at school with Kenneth's stepmother, and had used this ancient intimacy as a pretext for inviting the young man to Italy. He was the only son of Sir Garth Bennet, whom the press was wont to allude to as a "Rubber King." It was certain that he had made a vast fortune, selling his estate at a moment when the commodity was fetching very high prices in the

market. And as his second wife had only presented him with two rather sickly little girls it was quite possible that Kenneth would in due course inherit the whole of his father's wealth. Mrs. Meade had sincerely hoped that this highly eligible young man would take a fancy to Joyce, who was growing more and more difficult to please. That he was a Catholic did not disturb her in the least, for she held the comfortable conviction that one religion was as good as another when professed by a rich man.

But in the few days of his visit no progress had been toward the fulfilment of these anxious maternal hopes. The things of the intellect meant much to Kenneth and he found it difficult to talk to Joyce, to whom they meant little or nothing. Joyce was piqued at his lack of appreciation of her charms. Their wealth made no impression upon him, for he possessed that in his own home and accepted it as a matter of course. In truth he was bored at finding himself in such a completely worldly *milieu*. The Meades brought with them to Italy the atmosphere of an English country house where the wealth was a little too new. He might as well have been in England, he told himself, except for that divine view of the lake and for the slight difference in the food. The Meades found Italian dishes "amusing," and besides they were becoming fashionable; it would be *chic* to give them to their friends in London later on. To complete the illusion there was a newish English church in the neighborhood, to which of course Kenneth did not go, but the Meades liked to convey their hordes of smart friends thither on Sundays. They sometimes filled half the available pews, to the disgust of the more democratic tourists from the hotels.

"It was a mistake asking Hilary," remarked Joyce, in confidence to her mother that evening.

"She simply monopolized Kenneth. I've never known her freeze on to anyone like that before. But one wouldn't have thought either that that dairy-maid type would have attracted him."

She was fond of her mother, and although they sometimes squabbled in a manner that rather shocked Hilary when she had been an unwilling witness of it, they were never really estranged. Fundamentally they cared for the same things; their outlook was frankly materialistic; they despised people whose views differed from their own.

"I hinted that he had better not rush into an intimacy that he might afterward regret," said Mrs. Meade, in her smooth pleasant voice that was never so pleasant as when she was uttering a malicious speech. She had not liked to see her guest detached in this way. "I told him that although Hilary was a charming girl we really knew very little indeed about them. Of course we all like and appreciate poor dear Mrs. Mansfield, but there always remains the uncomfortable fact that she *did* live apart from her husband for many years before his death. Oh, I have always heard that from people who knew her in Ceylon when Hilary was quite a baby."

She made these damaging statements with an airy malice. But seeing Kenneth so quietly and skilfully detached from Joyce, she felt that the moment for crossing swords had indubitably arrived.

"I hope you damped his ardor," said Joyce. "After all, he's our guest and I rather hate people to take up violently with one's neighbors when they're staying here."

"It isn't exactly tactful," agreed Mrs. Meade, "but Kenneth is still very young—and I believe his father has brought him up in a queer Catholic sort of way—he's become almost a fanatic, I'm told. I'm sure, however, the Mansfields will bore Ken-

neth very soon—it will put him off only to see that depressing little house.”

Mrs. Meade sincerely believed that poverty even in its most modified forms must be repulsive to a young and wealthy man.

“I’m afraid he’s a prig,” said Joyce, regretfully; “he’s sure to go trotting all over the place sight-seeing with Hilary. Looking at moldy churches and picking up all the information he can! These Catholics always stick together.” She sighed.

“Oh, he’ll soon get tired of that high-brow business,” Mrs. Meade hastened to assure her daughter. “But I’ve learnt my lesson—I shall never ask Hilary here again when there’s any specially eligible young man. If you had only taken my advice and married Lord Bexley,” she added, recurring to an ancient grievance, “we should never have had this annoyance!”

Joyce pursed up her mouth and an angry flash came into her eyes.

“I couldn’t marry a man without a chin,” she said, with decision, “and of all the men we’ve had here this year Kenneth is far the best-looking and the richest. I’m disgusted with Hilary.”

Mrs. Meade secretly admired her daughter’s spirit. She brought such a cool head and heart to all her numerous love-affairs. She reflected too that it wouldn’t be so difficult for Joyce to retaliate, since there was every evidence of a sinister secret shadowing the lives of the mother and daughter at Villa Viola. . . .

The same idea had occurred to Joyce, for she added after a moment’s pause: “A girl who doesn’t know anything about her own father! Why, he may have been a convict for all we know!”

“Oh, my dear child, indeed I hope not!” cried Mrs. Meade, genuinely alarmed at the suggestion. “It would be dreadful to think we had had her here

so often and introduced her to so many of our friends."

CHAPTER IV

CONTRARY to Mrs. Meade's prognostications Kenneth's first visit to the Villa Viola only confirmed him in the admiration he had begun to feel for Hilary. It was so charming too, he thought, to see the mother and daughter together. Hilary was affectionate and protective in her attitude, almost as if she were the one to shield. It was interesting too to see the difference which even so brief an intervening generation could produce in character and outlook, for Hilary possessed all the symptoms of that strong and vigorous independence that women were just then beginning so fearlessly to display. But there was no mere pose of affection and sympathy such as he had sometimes seen between mother and daughter and which he had recognized as a subtle form of allurements. It was a frank and loving comradeship, with just a touch of worship on the girl's part. And he felt that it would not be difficult to worship Mrs. Mansfield. She was indeed so beautiful that he could scarcely take his eyes from her, and he found it hard to realize that she was the mother of this bright-haired young goddess. Hilary was, as he soon discovered, the stronger character of the two, more resolute, more fearless. She was the mainspring of the little ménage. She didn't lean upon or cling to her mother, for all that charming touch of adoration. On the contrary, she seemed to be holding out strong young arms to this lovely woman with the sad, beautiful eyes.

There was no poverty in the villa, but there was certainly that touch of not unpleasant austerity which he had come to associate with the houses of

devout Catholics, as if to them alms-giving were a more important thing in life than luxury. His father often denied himself necessities for a like reason—since his conversion indeed he had become slightly austere in the matter of personal comfort. Kenneth had even remonstrated with him on the subject, but now that he recognized the same spirit at Villa Viola, he began to think it attractive, especially after the suffocating luxury of the Meades' house.

Hilary was quite right, he decided—her mother was beautiful in a sense that she herself had missed. Mrs. Mansfield's beauty was an exquisite, finished thing of perfect line and dark soft coloring. But he thought that even so, Hilary possessed something in place of it that was even more worth while. She didn't somehow lose by the contrast. She was quick and vigorous with young life, like a wild spring flower that mocks at the gales and storms and gains part of its very freshness and fragrance and strength from them.

As he watched her, he thought: "I believe I must be falling in love. It would be terrible to think when I go away that I should never see her again. . . ."

Viola was undergoing a strange torment that made her very quiet and silent. She would have prevented his visit had it been possible to do so. But short of confessing to Hilary that she did not wish to meet Kenneth because she had once known his father, it was not possible. And had she not always felt and believed that one day the two parts of her life would join and leave either a seam or a scar? To plead a headache—she who never had headaches!—and remain in her room seemed to her a cowardly shirking of the situation. Hilary had returned on the preceding evening rather full of her new friend. But the name of Bennet with its

Ceylon associations had struck with a painful familiarity upon Viola's ear, and the addition of Kenneth left no reasonable room for doubt as to his identity. This was Garth's son, for whose sake he had tried to induce Viola to leave Hilary. When she saw Kenneth all possibility of doubt vanished. The boy had an extraordinary look of his father. Less tall and perhaps somewhat less handsome, he had the same candid dark eyes, the same grave look and quiet manner of speaking. When Viola saw him standing side by side with Hilary, she thought involuntarily: "They ought never to have met."

Garth Bennet was the only person outside her immediate family who knew the details of her story. More, he was the only person in the whole world who was aware of the identity of Hilary's father. The thought stabbed her like a knife. She could recall his words now: "I must think of Kenneth. . . ."

And now despite all those ancient precautions fate had brought the boy and girl together in this little lakeside town, and here was Hilary talking in a gay animated way that was almost new to her mother, just as if Kenneth had struck a chord in her nature that had never before been touched. Hilary was often shy and reserved with strangers, speaking little but listening thoughtfully. Viola felt that fate could hardly have offered to her gaze a more malicious complication than this sudden swift and inexplicable friendship that had sprung up between her daughter and Garth's son. It was a coincidence so unlikely, so on the face of it remote, that it was almost melodramatic. Sooner or later too Kenneth would be certain to begin to speak of Ceylon, and Viola would have to reveal the fact that the estates of Madura and Kellioya had actually joined, and that in those old days she had known his father.

Viola had often felt that some tremendous crisis would eventually precipitate her own confession to Hilary. Was that crisis approaching now, camouflaged perhaps by the first dawning of love in her daughter's heart? Hilary's pleasure in her new friend was quite frank and unconcealed; there was nothing to suggest the first awakening within her of a secret and more intimate tenderness.

"Do tell Mummie about your father's conversion," Hilary startled her by saying. "It's such a perfect little story—I didn't tell her on purpose that you might."

"Oh, if you'd care to hear," said Kenneth, hesitating. "It happened in Ceylon, where you know he spent some years. There was someone out there—a woman—he said she was one of the greatest saints he'd ever known. They were together when a young planter died, and she made him pray when he was dying. It made a great impression on my father, and he became a Catholic just before he married my stepmother. Would you like to know her prayer? It was: *Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, I trust in Thee.*"

Viola sat there very still; her slender hands clasped upon her lap. She was back in memory in the little bungalow down by the Kelli-Oya where Hartley Brett had died. The murmur of the river sounded in her ears, like the voice of many waters. And there, by her side, all unknown to her, the first seeds of a conversion were by the grace of the Holy Spirit being sown in another's soul.

And Garth had called her one of the greatest saints he had ever known. The thought came back to her with a kind of reluctant joy. So during the years that had intervened since their separation he had learned to condone the past, to realize perhaps her suffering, her long reparation. . . .

It was obvious that he had never mentioned her

name to his son. Kenneth was ignorant of the part she had played in his life.

"Don't you ever come to England, Mrs. Mansfield? If you do I should love you to bring your daughter to Stonewood. And I know my father would be delighted. He's always pleased if I bring Catholic friends to the house," he added, simply.

"No—we never go to England. I prefer to remain here," said Viola, coldly.

A trickle of malice from some of Mrs. Meade's speeches concerning their utter ignorance of Mrs. Mansfield's past life, seemed to cast a little dark smudge upon his mind. Was it possible that there could be any truth in her insinuations? Was it possible that there could be anything wrong? Their lives to outward seeming were so fair and limpid. . . . He looked from one to the other, almost with anguish. Then he breathed a sigh of relief. Of course Mrs. Mansfield must have been what is technically known as the "innocent party," since she had had the custody of her child. There was immense consolation in the thought. Nevertheless he longed to know the right and wrong of the story. Perhaps his father would be able to throw some light upon it. . . .

"I wish we could go," said Hilary, wistfully.

"I can't imagine anyone staying away from England for any length of time," said Kenneth.

"I feel English all the same," said Hilary.

"Did you ever meet my father in Ceylon, Mrs. Mansfield?"

"Yes—I remember meeting him with Mr. Keane. Your father is Sir Garth Bennet, isn't he?" Viola's tone was cold.

"Oh, you knew Mr. Keane too? David stays with us sometimes when he goes home. He manages my father's old estate Madura for the company who bought it. Mr. Keane lives at Madura now

with David, and the second son manages Kuduwatte. I want to go out and pay them a visit next year."

Viola listened. Her face was very pale, but she showed no sign of emotion.

"I must tell Dad," continued Kenneth, "he'll be awfully interested. He told me once that some of his happiest days had been spent in Ceylon."

"His wife had been dead a year or two when I first knew him," Viola said, quietly. "And I remember he used to speak of his son. . . . That was you—" she smiled at Kenneth.

"He was devoted to my mother," said Kenneth, "and sometimes I think he isn't very happy now. My stepmother is delicate and nervous, and the two little girls are often ill too. But we stick together a lot—Dad and I."

When he got up to go he asked timidly if he might come again.

"Whenever you like," said Viola, smiling.

"Oh, may I really come in to-morrow?"

And it was Hilary who answered: "Of course you may!"

When he had gone she turned eagerly to her mother and said: "Isn't he a dear? You did like him, didn't you, Mummie?"

"Yes."

"How odd that you should have known his father!"

"Madura was so near—the next estate."

"Did you like Sir Garth?"

"Yes."

"Mummie, if they ask us to Stonewood do say you'll go!"

"No, darling."

Hilary's face fell. There was something almost unreasonable to her about her mother's obstinacy on this point. Surely Kenneth must also have found

it a little strange. She came closer and took Viola's hand.

"Mummie, you're being mysterious with your only child! Has the reason got anything to do with my . . . my father?"

Viola drew her hand away; it was as if she shrank then from Hilary's frank young gaze, that warm loving contact.

"Don't ask me so many questions, darling." She looked at her appealingly.

"What a beast I am!" said Hilary, springing up and shaking herself rather after the manner of a big dog. "I'm always hurting you. You ought to tell me that I'm horrible!" She was angry with herself.

"No—no. It's only natural that you should be curious."

"Not if it hurts you," said Hilary. "Only, we oughtn't to have secrets from each other. Why, if something hurts you I'd rather share your pain. I'd rather suffer with you than be left out in the cold." She leaned over her mother and put her face against hers. The dark and fair hair mingled. Her loving words comforted Viola. They gave her hope for the future.

"Oh, no, Hilary. Why should you suffer? You're so young. You'd double my pain instead of sharing it." Viola freed herself, and her eyes had a look that was almost wild. Her courage was ebbing. "Hil, darling, please leave me."

Hilary gave her a parting kiss, and now thoroughly sobered went out of the room.

This coming of Kenneth would surely precipitate the crisis. Through long years Viola had dreaded the approach of this moment. And as it came nearer now she thought of the old hideous torture when victims were pressed to death. The great stone descended very slowly upon the prostrate and

bound form beneath it, watched ever by the eyes that dared not close but gazed upon it with a truly fearful fascination.

This evening she could almost feel the chill, heavy stone touching her forehead. Yet Hilary's words echoed in her ears, bringing a kind of forlorn comfort. "Why, if something hurts you, I'd rather share your pain. I'd rather suffer with you than be left out in the cold."

Hilary, when she knew all, would surely understand and forgive. . . .

CHAPTER V

DAY after day of that perfect spring weather Kenneth excused himself and fled from the sophisticated luxury of the Villa Glicine to the charming little pink house standing amid the vines and cypresses on the slopes above the town. He was never tired of exploring the places in the neighborhood in Hilary's company, or of rowing on the lake with her, or of sitting as evening approached in the vine-wreathed loggia with its view of the lake glinting between boughs of pine and cypress. He liked to watch the snow-fields on the Alps turning to gold and flame in the sunset, and then fading to a cold violet until night folded them in her ebony garments. He liked to see the lights of Bellagio pricking the darkness and casting those tremulous floating reflections in the black water. And most of all he liked to know that Hilary was sitting there watching these things with him, and to listen to the cool even tones of her voice.

Viola made no effort to interfere. She felt that it would have been cowardly to take her daughter away from the neighborhood until danger had passed and Kenneth had returned to England. And

almost always, as far as Kenneth was concerned, such a precaution would have come too late. He had begun to tell himself that he, the least susceptible of young men, had fallen in love with Hilary Mansfield at first sight. Already too he loved her mother. Teased at first by the hint of mystery, he now thought it only added a touch of romance to the beautiful strange woman who was Hilary's mother.

He was obviously so happy, that Mrs. Meade and Joyce let him go without any further hint of disapproval. If his visit had not been a success in the way they had planned, it had certainly been a source of considerable enjoyment to him, and he must always look back upon it with a sense of gratitude toward them. The prick of Joyce's pride had been assuaged by the arrival of another man, a good deal older than herself, with an unexceptionable rent-roll. He was evidently one who would "stand no nonsense," and was bent on taming the pretty little shrew in his own way. Mrs. Meade was astonished at the effect of these primeval tactics upon her modern little daughter. She did not seem to resent the process in the least. "She will certainly be a countess before the end of the year," thought Mrs. Meade. It consoled her for the defection of Kenneth.

Her complacency contrasted curiously with the anguish with which Viola was just then regarding her own daughter. She believed that the truth could not long be withheld from Hilary when Kenneth had once taken the step of writing to tell his father he had met the Mansfields in Italy. Garth would not be slow to recognize their identity. And surely he would step in and try to prevent his son from making what must be in his eyes a disastrous marriage. Kenneth might even leave Italy without speaking to Hilary of his love. . . .

Viola watched them with an almost fatalistic resolve to let things take their own course without any intervention from herself. She was quite sure that whatever happened she would never lose her daughter's love. If the blow fell it would fall upon them both and they would bear it together. Her child was no weakling; she would bear the impact stoically.

But so far Viola didn't think that Hilary was in love with Kenneth. She was enjoying his companionship openly and frankly, and for the first time in her life she had found a sympathetic comrade of her own religion and almost of her own age. She seemed wholly unaware too that his own feeling for her was rapidly assuming tormenting proportions. He loved her, and from day to day he put off writing that letter to his father to tell him that he had met the woman he wished to marry. He believed that it would be a relief to him to learn that he was going to marry a Catholic, and of course he would approve of Hilary—he had only to see her! And then a cold doubt would invade his heart like a great wave and he would say: "But perhaps she won't marry me. Perhaps she doesn't care." This thought made him shrink from writing to his father.

Longing for greater independence he left the Villa Glicine, and took a couple of rooms in a small hotel not far from the Villa Viola. He was free now to enjoy as much of Hilary's society as she chose to give him. Often he would wait for her in the road soon after dawn and climb up to the church with her for the first Mass. It was all so perfect at that early hour—the church very still and silent while the priest offered the Holy Sacrifice; the few kneeling peasants who with himself and Hilary formed the congregation; the coming out into the fresh chill morning air to see the lake lying beneath

them like a sheet of silver with the reflections in it looking like arabesques of gray velvet. But always the best moment of all was when he found himself kneeling near Hilary, stealing furtive glances at her bent head, her calm "recollected" face, her glowing eyes. Yes, her faith meant a great deal to her. She would help him, when the time came, to carry on the work inaugurated by his father at Stonewood. He was always very silent when they walked down the hill together after Mass with all the sweet fragrances of the Spring breathing in the air about them. He felt as if he had emerged from a holy consecrated hour that had in some sense blessed his love. . . .

He came into the loggia one morning to find Viola sitting there alone. He had been rather waiting for an opportunity to speak to her about Hilary, but now that it had come he felt a sudden, new shyness.

"Hilary has gone to the post. She'll be back very soon," said Viola, looking up from her work and smiling as she took Kenneth's outstretched hand.

He stood there irresolutely, gazing down at the lake across the terraced vine-clad slopes. Just below him was a wonderful thicket of glowing crimson rhododendrons that made a vivid patch of color against the blue water. The flower-beds were full of bright-hued cinerarias, blue, pink, and magenta-colored. Some tulips lifted ruby chalices to the invading bees, and there was a mingled fragrance of violets and narcissi.

The lake was turquoise-hued and very calm, with gray shadows that deepened to violet near the shore. There was a fresh cold feeling in the air that had strayed down from Alpine snow-fields.

Always, Kenneth felt, he would think of Spring and Hilary when he thought or spoke of Italy. It would mean just that to him as long as he lived.

At that moment he felt wonderfully, passionately alive. With a burst of courage he turned to Viola.

"I'm so glad to find you alone, Mrs. Mansfield. I've wanted to speak to you. About Hilary—you must have seen . . ."

When he thus uttered her name aloud for the first time in Viola's presence he thought that it held the most perfect music. Hilary . . .

"About Hilary?"

"Yes. I have fallen in love with her. I've made up my mind to ask her to marry me. But you—" and now he looked searchingly at the exquisite face of Hilary's mother—"you wouldn't think anyone quite good enough for her, I suppose?"

"I think the practical question is whether your father would think her good enough for you," said Viola, in a cold withdrawn tone.

"Oh, Dad'll just love her directly he sees her," said Kenneth, confidently. "And he's always wanted me to marry a Catholic."

The look in his shining enthusiastic eyes hurt her.

"Anyone would love her! . . . I'm lucky to be about the first to see her. You—you wouldn't be against it, would you?"

"I shouldn't be against anything that meant happiness for Hilary," she said, evasively.

"I know I could make her happy. The only thing is I'm afraid she doesn't care for me—not in that way at least. She's awfully charming to me and all that—" He stopped. "I don't believe she even guesses."

"You are very young," said Viola, suddenly pitying him. "It would be much wiser for you to go away and forget her."

"Forget her? Forget Hilary? But, my dear Mrs. Mansfield—!" His eyes were wide open with astonishment. Did she really believe such a thing was possible?

"At least go away. Wait a little while. Make quite sure. And ask your father's advice—and permission. . . ." The sentences dropped almost mechanically from her lips.

He pondered over this advice. Then he shook his head. "No, I can't wait. I must find out just where I stand. All these days I've felt as if I were hiding something from her. She—she's so wonderful, isn't she?"

"I'm quite sure Hilary has no idea of marrying at present."

"But if I can make her care for me? Oh, I know she likes me and all that!"

"Yes, yes, I'm sure she does."

"I've been meaning to write and tell Dad about you and Hilary, but the weeks have simply slipped past—there hasn't been time—and I suppose I shirked it. I've got into the habit of sending him postcards. Did he ever see Hilary when she was a little girl?"

"Yes. When she was two or three years old."

She could see the Colombo garden with all its gay brilliant emerald verdure, the scarlet hibiscus flowers, the golden allamandas, the bronze polished leaves of the crotons; the blue sky and sea and waving palms. Hilary was on her knee, and suddenly there was Garth's voice saying: "So it was Esmé?" . . .

The suspended stone seemed to come appreciably nearer to the waiting, helpless victim lying in dreadful anticipation beneath it. . . .

Kenneth was silent. Certainly Mrs. Mansfield was not encouraging. Perhaps after all she was selfish and didn't want Hilary to marry and leave her alone. And then too her manner seemed to suggest that his father would disapprove of the marriage.

Suddenly Viola rose and went up to him. She

stood by his side and her eyes gazed down upon the blue waters of the lake.

"Kenneth," she said, calling him by his name for the first time, though often she had felt as if she had a right to do so. "When you tell your father about Hilary will you tell him too that I—I quite foresaw he might possibly offer some objection? Say I felt that he might disapprove and therefore I urged you to go away—to try to forget her." Her tone was pleading.

His heart sank. She seemed to be destroying his bright hopes.

"Is there any special reason why he should object?" he asked, and his throat was so dry he could scarcely utter the words.

"Yes," said Viola.

"Does Hilary know of this reason?"

"No—she knows nothing."

"Won't you tell me?"

She shook her head. "If your father thinks it necessary—absolutely necessary—for you to know, I think he will tell you himself. It would be kind of you not to let it come to that. . . ."

"I'm sorry, but it must come to that," said Kenneth, resolutely. His young face hardened. He looked very like Garth at that moment. "It's something then that he knows?"

"Yes."

He felt as if he were groping in a darkness that had suddenly become sinister. A dull bewilderment of pain mastered him.

"I don't want to know! I want—Hilary!"

He threw himself into a chair and covered his face with his hands, as if to shut out the golden sunshine that seemed like a mockery. The very beauty of the scene, the blue lake, the crimson rhododendrons, the bright flowers, had become fantastic in his eyes. Reserved and self-controlled

as he was both by nature and upbringing, this collapse was in itself significant.

"If you would only take my advice and wait," she said, very quietly, "it would be better for everyone. Hilary is, I am certain, unconscious of your love. If you told her it might awaken her. And I don't want that to happen until you are quite sure you will be allowed to marry her."

He brushed his hand across his eyes with a violent gesture.

"Mrs. Mansfield—I don't understand. Didn't you *like* Dad? Were you—enemies?" Mrs. Meade's malicious innuendoes came back to him like a flock of evil preying birds.

"No. To a certain extent—up to a certain point—we were friends."

At that moment Hilary appeared, climbing up the path from the gate. She looked one with the bright Spring morning. Her face was glowing from her rapid walk in that chill strong air; there was a brilliant color in her cheeks and her eyes were shining. When she first appeared she was smiling, glad to find Kenneth already there, eager to learn what he had planned for the day. But her expression changed as her eyes fell upon him, sitting there in that despondent attitude, his face grave and gloomy, his eyes heavy and despondent. He got up and came toward her without speaking.

"Why, Kenneth, what's the matter?"

"I—I've been talking to your mother, Hil."

"What's Mummie been saying to plunge you into such depths of gloom?" inquired Hilary, cheerfully. It was absurd, but something of Kenneth's misery seemed to communicate itself to her, and a curious alarm took possession of her.

"Why, what's the matter?" she cried. "Has anything happened? Have you had bad news, Kenneth?"

"I have been giving Kenneth good advice," said Viola, "I only hope he will follow it."

"I don't know. I'm not sure of anything. I think I'll go away. I won't stay to lunch. . . ." He moved toward the *salotto* and Hilary followed him.

"Nonsense! Of course you're going to stay!" Her voice was emphatic. "Whatever Mummie may have said I'm sure she never told you to fly off like that."

Viola followed them into the sitting-room. Hilary looked from one to the other with a kind of dismay. What on earth did it mean—what had her mother been saying to him?

Kenneth's haggard face frightened her.

When he went across the room and into the hall beyond, Hilary accompanied him. Perhaps when she was alone with him he would tell her what had passed. He had opened the front door and she almost believed that he intended to go without a word of farewell. Timidly—for this was a new and strange Kenneth—she touched his sleeve.

"What is it, Ken? Do tell me!" she said.

The touch broke down his difficult self-control. For all answer he took her in his arms and kissed her almost with violence. She tried to break free, but he held her as in a vise.

"I love you," he said, "that's what it is. I want you to be my wife. I can't give you up for any reason in the world."

"Let me go," said Hilary, passionately.

He released her. She looked dazed and troubled. All her indignation had dropped from her. Kenneth loved her—and did her mother wish for any reason to prevent their marriage? Instinctively she put out her hands and held Kenneth's. This time her touch soothed and quieted him. There was promise in it. It gave him hope.

"I'm sorry, darling. Forgive me. . . . Hilary—be on my side. Don't let them separate us. Do you love me?"

Hilary looked at him. Perhaps she would not so readily have envisaged her own attitude toward him had there not been in that wonderful moment of revelation the threat of separation. It taught her beyond all doubt that she loved him.

"Yes," she said simply.

CHAPTER VI

IT WAS about this time that Sir Garth Bennet received a somewhat disturbing letter from Mrs. Meade.

She considered it her duty, she wrote, to let him know that his son was becoming seriously entangled with some neighbors of theirs—a mother and daughter of the name of Mansfield. Ten days ago he had left the Villa Glicine and had taken rooms at a small hotel quite near the Mansfields' *villino*. They were charming people, and Kenneth had originally met Hilary—that was the girl's name—at Villa Glicine, but they really knew very little about them. Mrs. Mansfield though still a comparatively young woman was quite a recluse, never going anywhere, and they could not help suspecting that there was some sad as well as disastrous story to account for her complete withdrawal. It was evident, the letter went on, that Kenneth was very much in love with Hilary; they were always out together, taking long walks, rowing on the lake, attending Mass, and visiting churches in the neighborhood. Mrs. Meade had felt it had become necessary to warn Sir Garth, because he would certainly wish to know much more about his son's future wife than she or anyone else knew about Hilary Mansfield. But as

they had been in Ceylon many years ago he would probably remember them, and might even be able to throw some light upon the story.

Sir Garth had thought little of the paucity and infrequency of his son's communications during his visit to Italy. He was not an exacting parent, and he wanted the boy to enjoy his holiday. But Mrs. Meade's letter showed him beyond doubt that there had been a reason for Kenneth's laconic post-cards.

Hilary Mansfield, living alone with her mother! Some sad and disastrous story to account for this complete withdrawal. . . . Mrs. Meade's phrases hit the mark with a more forceful and definite precision than her wildest imaginings had ever pictured. Remember them? Sir Garth remembered them only too well, and as he read the letter that last poignant scene when he had said good-by to Viola in the moonlight-flooded veranda at Colombo rose up before his mind. He seemed to see with a curious and agonizing accuracy her pale beautiful face with its cloud of dark hair, the quiet soft look in her eyes. He had told her plainly that in marrying him she must renounce Hilary. He had his son to consider. . . . He felt that fate in bringing their two children together after all these long years had dealt him a stealthy stab in the back. . . .

He had never been really happy in his second marriage. He had been rather pushed into it by his own people, who assured him that his boy needed a woman's care. But the second Lady Bennet had never shown the slightest affection for Kenneth; She was far too much wrapped up in her own ailments and in the health of her two ailing little girls. Nor had the boy ever cared for her. He adored his father, and to Garth he was the one thing in the world he really loved. All his hopes were bound up in this, his only son. And never before had Kenneth either kept anything a secret from

him or given him the slightest ground for anxiety. He was a good Catholic, upright, sincere, straightforward. He was indeed all that Sir Garth had so ardently wished his son to be.

And in his heart he knew that he had made one very great sacrifice for him. It was for Kenneth's sake he had not married Viola. His conditions had proved too hard for her. . . . And he had not seen his way to changing them.

Sir Garth followed his first impulse and made immediate preparations for a journey to the Lake of Como. It was a part of the world he had not visited for many years. He did not warn his son of his advent. There would be a certain difficulty about doing that. That he should probably see Viola again at the end of his journey gave him an odd sensation that he could only describe as a shrinking of the heart. He knew that he could not see her again, however altered she might be, without emotion. She was the one woman who had spelt romance for him. She had come into his life across his own extreme desolation and given him hope and consolation. And she had been the human instrument through whom the great gift of faith had come to him. She seemed to have changed the aspect of both heaven and earth for him, and he was profoundly grateful to her. It was all the more terrible that for the second time he would have to interpose and hurt her. For on one point his mind was absolutely made up. Kenneth was not to be permitted to marry Hilary. And when he learned the truth of that disastrous story, surely all wish to marry her would leave him. . . .

Sir Garth traveled through to Italy without delay. He arrived about dinner-time at the hotel where Kenneth was staying. Mr. Bennet, he was told, had just come in and was having his dinner. In

another moment the father and son were face to face.

They grasped each other's hands, and a kind of sick relief came into Kenneth's face at the sight of the father whom he loved so deeply. "Dad!" he said. Something in Garth's look told him that he knew about Hilary, and Mrs. Mansfield's words of implicit warning recurred to him with an almost sinister significance. . . .

They ate their dinner almost in silence. As yet the hotel was not very full. The annual influx of British and American tourists had scarcely begun.

At a round table in the middle of the room there was an Italian family, the father and mother and three children, all deeply engaged in the ceremony of eating. The little girls, daintily dressed and with big butterfly bows in their clipped hair, were charming dark-eyed creatures. At another table sat a very British-looking figure clad in stout gray tweed. Her grizzled hair hung untidily above a plain but pleasant countenance. She had bowed slightly to Kenneth when she came into the room.

After dinner Kenneth rose. "Shall we have coffee in the lounge, Dad?" he asked.

Garth assented. He followed his son into a glazed loggia, full of palms and orange trees in big terra-cotta tubs, overlooking the lake. The night was fine and the stars showed brilliantly in a sky that was almost black. The father and son were alone together. A waiter brought them coffee and cigarettes. Garth felt a strange unwillingness to speak. He wished Kenneth would say something.

His young face was haggard and miserable, but he did not look ill at ease or embarrassed at the sudden appearance of his father.

He broke out at last: "I suppose you've come about Hilary, Dad."

"Yes," said Garth. "What has Mrs. Mansfield told you?"

"She only said that you wouldn't approve. She asked me to go away—not to speak to Hilary. . . . But I couldn't keep silence. I felt I must know where I stood. She loves me, Dad." His voice, still constrained and cold, had now for the first time a slight tremor in it. "Mrs. Mansfield wrote and told me not to go there again until I had consulted you. That was four days ago. I haven't seen Hilary since. She wouldn't go against her mother, but I think she must be suffering too."

"You spoke to her?" said Garth.

"Yes. She looked so beautiful, I couldn't help myself," Kenneth answered, simply.

"What did she say to you?"

"She does care. I'd always felt so uncertain—she's very young, you know. But we'd been together a lot . . . they'd both been so kind to me. I left the Meades so that I might see more of Hilary."

"Did you think of any possible reason there might be for Mrs. Mansfield's saying I should not approve?" inquired Garth.

Kenneth shook his head. "I thought it was a mistaken idea of hers. Hilary's a Catholic, and I knew you'd always hoped I should marry one. I meant to write to you . . . but I've felt so miserable all these days. I wanted to tell you, Dad!"

"I'm sure you did. But there are things you ought to know. And when you know them I hope you will see too how impossible this marriage would be for you. . . ."

Kenneth's face was deadly pale. "What things?" he faltered. "No—don't tell me! I'd rather not know. I don't care what it is. I love Hilary . . ."

Then very quietly Garth revealed to his son the secret of Viola Mansfield's life. There was no doubt that she had been very cruelly wronged, duped and

deceived into a sham marriage when she was still a very young inexperienced girl. But the grim fact remained, and she herself would be the last to minimize it. Hilary was not a legitimate child.

"She might have married the man, but he made a stipulation that their child should be brought up a Protestant. His parents' consent to the marriage depended upon this. She had to choose. It was a momentous decision for her to make, but it seemed that she did not hesitate. She preferred that her child, then unborn, should go through life with this stigma attached to her rather than deprive her of her faith."

Kenneth, who had listened in somber dejected silence to this recital, now lifted his head.

"But that was simply splendid of her!" he said, and his eyes shone. "She looks capable of it, too. And if Hilary knew—it seems a queer thing to say—I believe she'd tell her she was right."

"Kenneth, you're both very young. You've known each other such a very little while. The hurt to you both can only be a passing one. I want you to go home—to try to forget her. Not to see her again. The honor of our name is in your hands."

Kenneth set his teeth. "I don't care about my name! I want Hilary."

He belonged to a younger generation that possessed a wider outlook, less care for the past and its traditions, a determination to seize and enjoy the gifts that the present offered. Not to await a nebulous uncertain future . . .

"I love her. I don't care for anything else in the world. I mean to marry her. If her father was a scoundrel her mother is a saint! Why should Hilary suffer because of her father? Who was he? Did you know him?"

"Yes, I knew him."

"But no one knows anything of Mrs. Mansfield's

story! How did you come to know? How did you hear?" He fixed his dark eyes challengingly upon his father's face.

"She told me about it herself," said Garth, half-reluctantly.

"Told you? Were you such friends, then?"

"She told me on the day when I asked her to marry me." For the first time in his life Garth alluded to that past event. "I thought—as everyone who knew her in Ceylon thought—that she was a married woman living apart from her husband. I asked her if there was no hope of her getting her marriage annulled. I knew she was a Catholic, and therefore I believed that she could not get a divorce and free herself. And I—I loved her. I felt she would be a beautiful mother to you."

"You loved her?" Kenneth stared at his father in bewildered astonishment. "Why didn't you marry her then when you found she was free?"

"Because of Hilary. Rightly or wrongly, I felt I couldn't have Hilary with us. But Mrs. Mansfield refused to give her up."

"But why did you want to separate them?" Kenneth felt that his father's condition had been both cruel and harsh.

"It was on your account," said Garth. "I made the sacrifice for you."

Kenneth was silent. He felt almost stupefied by these revelations. But he understood now better than before why his father was now urging him to make sacrifice of his own love. To put the earth and the wide seas between himself and Hilary. Never to see her again. He leaned forward and buried his face in his hands.

"I can't do it! I can't do it." His throat seemed to close on the words.

"I shall go and see Mrs. Mansfield to-morrow morning, and discuss the matter with her," said

Garth, rising. "I shall send up a note to-night to ask her if she will receive me. Good-night, Kenneth."

He went out of the room.

A gleam of hope came into the boy's heart. "He'll change his mind when he sees Hil," he thought.

Certain as he felt of Hilary's love, he knew there was still another force against which he had to contend—Hilary's love for her mother. She would in this crisis obey her implicitly. Everything depended upon the results of that crucial interview between his father and Mrs. Mansfield on the morrow. They would meet as old friends to discuss the vital problem of their children's future. . . .

He went out and walked along the lakeside till he came to the flagged path that led up to the Villa Viola. The light in Hilary's room was still burning. Perhaps even now she was kneeling there, praying. The thought sobered him. He felt the strength of Hilary, her essential goodness, her sweetness of disposition. The spiritual strength of her. In her young fair beauty, wholesome, innocent, unspoiled, she seemed just then so close to him . . .

He went back to the hotel and up to his room in a happier, calmer frame of mind.

CHAPTER VII

VIOLA had no need to open Sir Garth's note in order to ascertain the identity of the writer. Immediately she recognized that stiff, upright handwriting. She read it through without emotion, and scribbled a hasty answer to say that she would receive him on the following morning at eleven o'clock. It was an hour when Hilary was almost always out. Later, if he wished, he could see her.

It had been a matter of surprise to Viola to discover that Hilary undoubtedly reciprocated Kenneth's feeling for her. The moment of that ultimate crisis was now approaching, and Viola felt imbued with a strange, almost fierce courage. She was prepared to fight for her child's happiness, to plead for the young couple. Since Kenneth had spoken to Hilary, disregarding all her earnest advice that he should await his father's approval, matters had progressed too far for any effort of hers to arrest them. She had simply forbidden Kenneth to come to the house for the present. He had obeyed without demur. But Sir Garth's prompt arrival had puzzled Viola. There had been no time to summon him except perhaps by telegram. She wondered with aching heart what had passed between the father and son at that first meeting, surely a momentous interview. Sir Garth gave her no inkling as to what was passing in his own mind. The note simply asked if he might come to see her.

Her heart beat a little more quickly when he came into the sunny loggia where she was sitting with her books and work. She rose to greet him, and his first thought was how little she had essentially changed. She was still the same Viola, grave, beautiful, with the haunting eyes, the steady mouth with the slight droop in it, accentuated now in some degree, and giving an indescribable air of melancholy to the whole face. If he had imagined the sight of her now would have obliterated that earlier and adored vision of her which he had for so long carried secretly in his memory, he was mistaken. Viola was Viola, the woman who had renounced such untold things for her child.

"You know why I've come," he said, sitting in a wicker chair when the first cool greetings were over, and gazing straight in front of him to where the lake lay like a vast sheet of impalpable gray light. The

sunlight poured its largess of gold upon the fresh emerald of young leaves and on the somber branches of pine and ilex. "It's this business of Kenneth's," he added.

Viola sat silent, her pale hands folded in her lap.

"You must help me, you know," he went on, slightly embarrassed by her continued silence. "I shall need your help. You foresaw, Ken tells me, the impossibility of such a marriage for him."

"No—I only foresaw that you would disapprove of it," she said, quickly, "and I urged Kenneth not to speak to Hilary until he had heard from you. But he didn't wait. He kissed her and asked her to be his wife. It did just what I dreaded—it awakened Hilary to a knowledge of her own love for him. Up till then I believe the child only regarded him as a friend, a comrade of her own age."

Sir Garth fixed his eyes upon the splendid shape of Monte Grigna outlined against the sky.

"They are very young, fortunately," he said; "they will soon forget each other. And I don't believe Ken would eventually disobey me. You—you perhaps can count equally upon your daughter?"

"Garth," she said, calling him by his name for the first time, "I don't mean to interfere with Hilary. You mustn't ask me to do that. Tell Kenneth all about her history if you like; you are the only person in the world who knows all its details. If he gives her up there is no more to be said."

"You are asking me to say that all the sacrifices we both made in the past are to be in vain," he retorted, quickly.

Oh, it had been so unnecessary, yet so irremediable, this fortuitous encounter of their two children for whose sakes they had renounced both love and happiness fourteen years ago. While Garth had lived down, with all the effort of a strong will, his own desolation that followed on their parting, he

had never forgotten Viola. His life had not been happy with his second wife. He had been a good, patient husband, humoring all her whims, listening with unfailing kindness to her ceaseless complaints, consoling himself always with his love for his son, his son's love for him. He looked appealingly at Viola.

"You mustn't ask me to sacrifice Hilary, and her happiness," she said, in the old quiet, decisive way. "They love each other. You must see her. Perhaps when you see her you will understand that it wouldn't be altogether easy for Kenneth to give her up."

"Hilary knows nothing?"

"Nothing at all. She's such a child in so many ways—I've tried to keep her from all knowledge of evil."

You must see her . . . He had not wished for that ordeal. The daughter might evoke insupportable memories of Viola as she had been in those far-off Ceylon days.

"Kenneth told you I'd become a Catholic?" he asked.

"Yes. I was so glad—so thankful—" Her eyes kindled.

"It was your doing, Viola. Your prayers when poor young Hartley died. I'd never thought much about the Catholic Church till then—I'd come across so few Catholics. You showed me the way . . . and I might never have found it otherwise." His face softened. "I owe you a great deal."

She rose then and came toward him. "Garth, if you feel that you owe me anything, don't interfere with Hilary's happiness now! She's more to me than all the world. She'll make your son a good wife. She's a very devout Catholic. And she loves him . . ." Her voice faltered. She was pleading

for her child as he was dimly aware she had never in all her life pleaded for herself.

"You mustn't ask that of me," he said, harshly. "Kenneth must think of our name. Oh, I know it was through no fault of yours that Hilary's an illegitimate child! But the ugly fact remains, and we can't get over it."

"What did Kenneth say when you told him?" she inquired.

"Oh, Kenneth's in love—he only wants Hilary. You know what boys are—they never think of the future. They don't seem to have the same sense of duty we used to have. Kenneth will suffer a good deal at first—but afterward he'll live to thank me . . ."

Viola was silent. She had long ago become aware of that hard, obdurate strain in Garth's character. Austerity had deepened it. Once she too had been bruised, almost broken, by its impact.

"I made so sure you would help me," he said, at last.

"Not against Hilary. I would have helped you in any other way, if you had ever needed it."

"I want to get this business settled and take Kenneth home with me to-night," he said, and now there was a touch of exasperation in his tone. "It's no use his staying here. He must think things well over in any case. And if he still persists in making an imprudent marriage, that will be his own affair."

He thought inconsequently then of his son as he had last seen him sitting with his face buried in his hands in the lounge at the hotel. There had been a dreadful despair in the attitude, as if his very soul were the prey of conflicting loyalties. Garth believed that Kenneth's loyalty to himself would ultimately prevail. This scrap of a girl whom he had only known a few weeks wouldn't surely count for anything in the long run.

"I myself think it would be best for him to go away for a time," said Viola. "I'm not afraid, though, that he'll forget Hilary. But, as you say, he must be given the chance to consider the matter thoroughly."

The feeling that Hilary could enter any house as an unwelcomed bride touched her pride sharply. Hilary's affections were not easily aroused, she had always been slow even to make friends. The glad rapture of her young love, dimmed and sobered as it had been during those last few days by Kenneth's enforced absence, had been a wonderful thing to behold. It had changed the girl utterly, deepening the essential sweetness of her. Love had quickened her, as it does the young, to a more vital life. It seemed to have shed a new radiance upon her beauty. She realized there would be difficulties, though she was very far from divining their grave nature, but hope and love were both far too strong not to triumph over that suggestion of doubt and uncertainty. Viola had not had the heart to tell her the truth. She was bound to know it now, and she would bear it better when she knew that Kenneth's love was securely hers.

Hilary was coming down the hill. She had been up to pay her usual daily visit to the church and had remained there a little longer than usual, her heart full of thanksgiving for her own happiness. As she approached the gate of the villa she saw Rebecca's form standing there as if awaiting her. This unusual sight caused her to quicken her pace.

Rebecca looked a very odd, very British figure, in her old-fashioned raiment, her prim cap, her thin, grim face under the carefully parted hair.

"Miss Hilary!" she said, in a mysterious whisper.

"Why, what's the matter, Becky?"

"Sir Garth Bennet has come, miss. He's in the

loggia with your ma. He came soon after you'd gone out."

"Is Kenneth with him?" asked Hilary, eagerly.

Rebecca had as yet been told nothing of the affair, but she had used her eyes and brains to good purpose, and was convinced that the frank, sudden friendship would end in wedding-bells.

Hilary was astonished and slightly disquieted. Why had he come? It was only five days since she had first learned of Kenneth's love for her, and there had been barely time to summon Sir Garth to Italy. Perhaps some rumor had reached his ears from another source. Perhaps he had traveled hither in hot haste to step in and prevent the engagement. Hadn't her mother told Kenneth that she was certain his father would disapprove of the idea of his marrying her daughter?

"No, miss. He came quite alone."

"Why has he come do you think, Becky?"

Hilary slipped her hand in her old nurse's arm and together they went toward the house.

Rebecca did not move a muscle of her harsh countenance.

"I'm sure I couldn't say, miss."

The flowers were very bright on the terrace as they passed by. The somber foliage of pine and ilex and cypress looked almost black beside the brilliant spring verdure that was everywhere bursting into leaf.

Hilary cleared her throat. She would not permit these misgivings to spoil her immense trust in the happiness of the future.

"Becky, had you ever seen Sir Garth before?"

"A great many times, miss."

"In Ceylon?"

"Yes, miss . . . When we were at Kellioya. You were almost a baby then."

Hilary still felt that obscure inexplicable anxiety.

She was positive now that this visit of Sir Garth's concerned herself. Perhaps indeed he had traveled to Italy with the intention of putting an abrupt end to the affair. Why? Why shouldn't she marry his son? She pressed Rebecca's arm as if the little contact gave her courage.

"Was he nice? Did you like him, Becky?"

"Yes, he seemed a very nice gentleman. He wanted to marry your ma at one time."

"Wanted to marry Mummie?" exclaimed Hilary, now profoundly interested. "But he must have known he couldn't! My father was still alive then, wasn't he?"

This point had always puzzled Rebecca. She only said after a slight pause: "Perhaps he thought something could be done, miss."

Had her mother cared for this man? Was it for this reason that there had always been something tenderly maternal in her manner to Kenneth? Even at their first meeting Hilary had noticed her unusually soft way of speaking to him . . .

Hilary entered the house and went into the *salotto*. Viola came in almost at once through the window that led from the loggia. She said quickly: "Sir Garth Bennet has come, Hilary."

A tall, thin man with a slight stoop followed Viola into the room. They all three stood there, facing each other. To an onlooker there was something dramatic in the little scene. But Hilary, with all her abounding beauty, her youth and look of supple strength, the charm and sweetness of her, was not a vision to provoke either compassion or contempt.

Garth took her hand and gave her a quick penetrating glance. Her face was still rosy and glowing from exercise and from the contact with that strong pure air of the Spring morning; her hat had slipped back a little and beneath it he caught a glimpse of the golden crinkly hair that waved above it like an

aureole round the picture of a very youthful saint; her clear eyes were shining with subdued excitement. As he looked at her Garth's heart sank. There was more than reason for Kenneth's madness. No wonder the girl had swept him off his feet.

"You don't remember me, of course?" he said.

"I think I do vaguely," answered Hilary. His voice had seemed to touch some forgotten chord of memory.

"You were such a very little girl at Kellioya."

"Quite big enough to be very odious, I expect," said Hilary, giving a little tinkle of laughter.

When she smiled she was adorable. Her beauty couldn't of course be compared with Viola's, and yet she had something that her mother hadn't got. . . .

"Your mother didn't think so," he said.

"Oh, Mummie's always spoilt me!" said Hilary, cheerfully.

If all had been smooth and straight, how he would have welcomed this girl, daughter of the woman whom he had once so deeply loved, as his son's wife. Her look of superb health and beauty, the candid sweetness of her, charmed him against his will. He had to tell himself again and again that the honor of his name and race counted for more than this young madness of love which surely Kenneth would soon learn to subdue . . . and to forget . . .

But once, so his thoughts now ran, he had immolated his own love on that self-same altar. What had it led to? Not happiness surely, although he had resolutely lived down his grief, had been the faithful, tender husband of another woman. Was it fair to ask a similar sacrifice of Kenneth? And . . . of Viola? Tormented with these problems, he gazed almost with anguish from Viola to Hilary . . .

The evil moment could not be deferred. And he was conscious that from time to time a faint cloud of anxiety was adumbrated upon Hilary's face. She

must surely guess that he had come hither to discuss the proposed engagement, possibly indeed to veto it altogether. So far, without adducing any particular reason for that expected disapproval on his part, Viola must have conceded the truth to Hilary.

"Is Kenneth coming this morning?" asked Hilary, giving him the opening he desired.

"No. I wished to see you and your mother alone. If Kenneth takes my advice he will return with me to England to-night." And now his voice was hard, intentionally cruel. Hilary blanched under the words.

"Go back to England with you to-night?" she exclaimed, incredulously.

Although she was so young she had a certain air of assurance that made her seem older than she was. She wasn't a child, and this fact increased his difficulty.

"But he'll come to say good-by?" she asked, and her voice trembled a little. For the first time she felt that very strong and hostile though obscure forces were at work to separate her from Kenneth.

"I don't think so," said Garth, not looking at her.

"Why—what do you mean?" Some suspicion that behind it all there was some terrible reason—some just reason—for this attitude, came into her mind. It made her cry out: "What do you mean? What is there against me? Kenneth loves me—he's asked me to be his wife . . . And now you don't want him to see me again! I insist upon knowing why—I'm not a child, to be kept in the dark!"

She seemed to be striking out blindly, violently, like a creature maddened by some sudden unexpected wound. Was there anything against her? Was there any real reason why Sir Garth should wish to banish his son in this way? Was there any truth in those hideous, malicious little innuendoes which Joyce Meade had not attempted to spare her? Yes,

there had always been something "queer" about her situation. Her mother's life was still shadowed by some dark, past secret . . . And the chill darkness of that shadow seemed to envelop her now, blinding her, choking her . . .

"Hush, Hilary darling." Her mother's voice came across the silence like some tender, soothing music. She felt Viola's hand clasping hers. The touch gave her strength.

"Is it—is it—something that Kenneth knows?" she cried.

"Yes," said Garth Bennet.

"And because of it—he doesn't love me any more?" There was a note of fierce determination in her voice now as if she intended to learn the truth at all costs.

"No. He loves you as much as ever. But he is young—in time he would learn to forget . . . to see the impossibility—" Garth broke off.

"But I don't understand why you want him to go? What is there against me?—Against—" her voice dropped—"my mother's child?"

A dull flush came into Garth Bennet's face. He remembered then all that he owed to Viola. And she had told him that she was not prepared to sacrifice Hilary. Always, always Hilary had come first with her. For this child of hers she had made sacrifices that were almost too great to be envisaged. For Hilary, and Hilary's faith. . . .

"Hilary, when you know I hope you will forgive me." He took up his hat and stick. It was as if he was no longer able to witness the grief and emotion his words had caused.

Hilary was sitting on the sofa now, her face buried in her hands, sobbing as she had never sobbed since she was a little child. She did not notice Sir Garth's departure. He was going to take Kenneth

from her, and the extremity of this loss filled her thoughts to the exclusion of all else.

Garth held out his hand to Viola. "Good-by," he said.

As he went out of the room he thought for the first time:

"She changed the meaning of life for me, and this is how I'm repaying her . . ."

They were fighting each other now for the welfare of their children. It was a fiercer, more embittered conflict than the former one, which had only concerned themselves. . . .

CHAPTER VIII

HILARY drew her mother to the sofa, clasping her. Her sobs had ceased.

"Mummie, I feel frightened. Don't let go of me."

Viola slipped her arm about the young and vigorous body. At such a moment Hilary was only her baby, to be comforted and soothed.

"Mummie, what's happened about Ken? Is it something so very dreadful?"

She sat staring in front of her with haggard eyes. Something of youth had gone out of her face. She looked older, almost worn.

"Is it—some reason connected with my father?" she asked.

Her young tormented eyes searched her mother's face, as if demanding the truth from her. Yes, the truth, no matter how hard, how cruel a thing it might be.

"Yes," said Viola. Her hands were strained tightly together; she hardly dared look at her daughter then. The moment of revelation had come, and she could only pray that she and Hilary

might bear its anguish together, so that it would cast at least no shadow upon their happy love. She prayed, too, that she might be spared the ultimate punishment of losing her daughter's love . . .

Even now Viola did not deceive herself. She deserved even this punishment for her own wilful rebellion against the Church's laws, for that past deliberate misuse of her beautiful gift of free-will. And it was that rebellion, with all it included of blindness and ecstasy, so fruitful, too, in its dire and everlasting consequences, that had brought her to this moment of culminating anguish. If Hilary's love for her were to perish now, she would have to accept that also as the just and inevitable penalty of her past mutiny. For in her heedless rebellion she had involved another soul besides her own. The white soul of Hilary. . . .

She stood up and looked at the fair bowed head.

"Perhaps you won't be able to forgive me, Hilary," she said.

Her tone was dull and frozen.

For of course the punishment must involve Hilary also. In some sort it had already pierced her sharply with the point of its sword. She thought with poignant suffering of the long and happy years she had spent with her little girl. Of the way in which she had tried to teach and train her. Of her love, growing greater every day. Of her thankfulness for Hilary's goodness, her passionate faith, her love . . .

"Forgive you, darling Mummie?" said Hilary, looking up and smiling through her tears.

"I wronged you, Hilary. Before you were born I wronged you."

Hilary's clear eyes had a look of terror in them. "Oh, but Joyce said it couldn't possibly be your fault because you'd had me with you always. She said, in a separation, it was always the innocent one who had

the custody of the child. Don't tell me it was your fault, Mummie!"

She had always regarded her mother as a saint. Viola's character seemed to her of an almost flawless perfection. She had a terror of beholding the destruction of her idol. "Don't tell me, Mum! I think I'd rather not hear . . ."

"It wasn't my fault in the way you mean," said Viola, aghast to find that Joyce had discussed the possibilities of the case in so much detail. "I was not . . . an unfaithful wife. But, dear Hilary, I was never your father's wife at all."

As she spoke she turned her face abruptly away. She did not wish to see her child's face then. She thought: "This is the end. I've forfeited her love . . ."

"Never his wife? You were never married at all?" The look of horror deepened in Hilary's eyes.

"I was never married."

"And I? What am I?"

"You are not a legitimate child, Hilary."

"You should have told me . . ."

"I always meant to tell you when you were older."

"Does Ken know?"

"Garth told him last night."

There was a long silence, then Hilary said:

"Why didn't my father marry you, Mummie?"

"We went through a form of marriage in what I believed was a Protestant chapel, and it was only many weeks later that he told me it wasn't a legal ceremony. Then a little later, when I realized you were coming into the world, he offered to marry me. But it was on the condition that you—that all our children—should be brought up as Protestants. Hilary, I had to choose one of two things for you. I chose what I believed to be right even though it involved us both in suffering. Where I was wrong

was in going through that ceremony, deliberately foregoing the blessing of the Church upon my marriage. I was very young, but I knew that I was doing wrong. I disobeyed, I rebelled, because I loved him."

Hilary was measuring with her young clear vision the precise extent of her mother's sacrifice.

"I thought perhaps when you realized what you had in place of name and position, that you would forgive me."

Hilary still remained silent. She was beginning to understand what it must have cost her mother to make that mighty decision while still in her young youth. To keep this shadow in their lives. To cling to the Cross, as an expiation, a reparation . . . Of course, just at first, one felt the shame. But it had been heroic, this action of her mother's. Being what she was she could have made no other choice. It was a characteristic result of Hilary's upbringing that she was able, even then, to envisage the problem from a Catholic standpoint.

"How did Sir Garth know?" she asked, suddenly.

He had lost no time in traveling to Italy, to rescue his son from the proposed marriage. Someone must have warned him, and he, aware of the stigma that was attached to her, had come to urge Kenneth to leave her. The thought was terrible to Hilary. It made her feel like a pariah—an outcast—a scape-goat. Suffering, too, through no fault of her own.

"I had to tell him when I was in Ceylon. He came to ask me if there was no way of having my marriage dissolved. He wanted to marry me, and he thought—as everyone else did—that I was living apart from my husband. I felt then that I had to tell him the truth."

"And then—wouldn't he marry you?" asked Hilary.

"Yes, he still wished it. But he made a condition, Hilary. I should have had to give you up. He didn't want you to live with us. I should have had to renounce you . . ." She looked wistfully at her daughter.

Hilary rose and came up to her and put her arms round her.

"Mummie darling—I'm glad that you didn't give me up. Will you tell me one thing more? I want to know my father's name."

"It was Esmé Craye. He was Lord Bethnell's only son. They have a place at Ardlesham in Hampshire, near where I lived with Aunt Hope as a child. We played together as children. He was Garth's cousin."

"And he never saw me—his only child?"

Viola shook her head. "You were born in Italy. And when you were six months old I took you to Kellioya."

There was a long pause, then Hilary said:

"Mum, has it made up to you at all, having me?"

"It's made up for everything!" Viola's voice was emphatic. "You have been all my world, Hilary. I wish I could have given you the things you had a right to. But I've given you what I could."

Their eyes met. The girl's face was wonderful then, all softened and radiant despite the tears that still hung on her eyelashes.

"Mum, I've been thinking it over . . . and I want to tell you—"

"Yes, darling?"

"If I'd had to make that choice you had to make—about me, I mean—I should have done just what you did. I'd rather be a Catholic than have—the other things. If it weren't for Ken I shouldn't mind so much about the rest."

There was a little stir in the loggia and Kenneth

entered the room. He was breathless as if he had been running.

The mother and daughter drew apart.

He did not seem to notice Viola, but went straight across the room to Hilary and gathered her in his arms.

"Hil, darling, I've come back . . . You didn't think, did you, that I ever meant to go away? I love you, Hil . . ."

"But your father—" said Viola.

Kenneth turned to Viola as if he were for the first time aware of her presence. His thoughts had all been for Hilary, as if he had guessed something of the suspense she must have been suffering.

"Oh, I was forgetting. Dad gave me this note for you." He thrust an envelope into Viola's hand.

She went out into the loggia. Standing there she broke the seal and drew out a flimsy sheet of paper on which a few words were hastily scrawled.

"I am sending Kenneth back to your daughter. You were right—I can't ask you to sacrifice her. I owe you a great debt, and I have always felt it was greater than I could ever repay. But I can pay back something of it now by giving you Hilary's happiness. My blessing on them both.

"GARTH."

THE END

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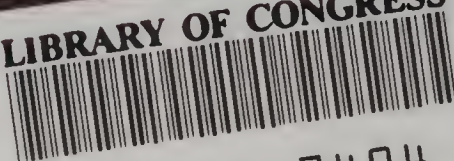
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